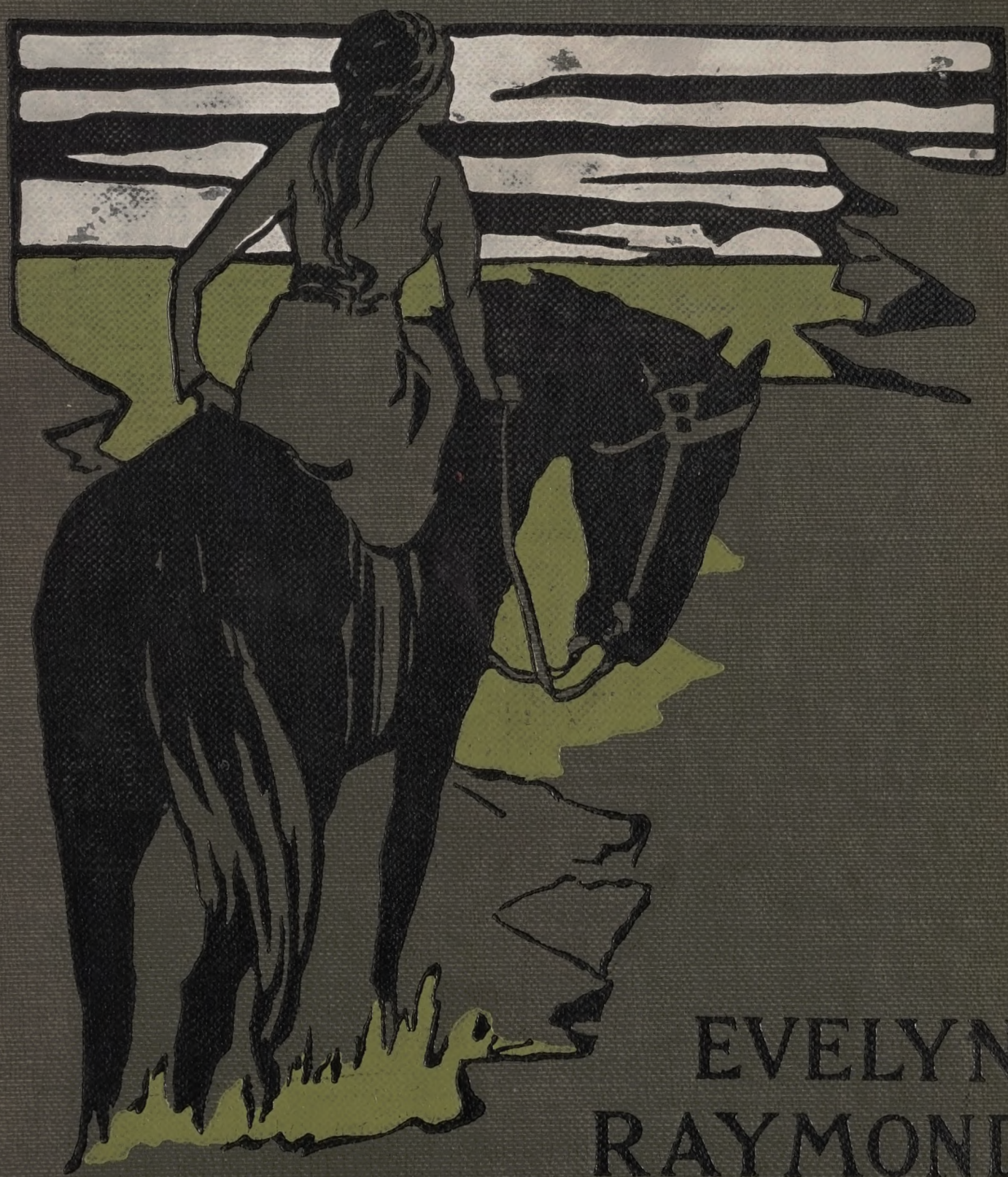


JESSICA TRENT'S INHERITANCE



EVELYN
RAYMOND



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"One silent, prolonged clasp of her daughter's little figure, one light kiss on the pretty lips."
(See page 13)

JESSICA TRENT'S INHERITANCE

BY

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"Jessica Trent," "Jessica The Heiress," "Breakneck Farm," etc.



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JESSICA TRENT'S INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER I.

JESSICA BEGINS A LONG JOURNEY.

"O mother! How can I bear it? How can I go?" cried Jessica Trent, clinging fast to the slender, black-robed figure standing a little apart on the platform of the railway station.

"Bravely and hopefully, my darling, as befits the daughter of Cassius Trent. Eagerly, I trust, as one who goes to finish his life work;" answered the almost heart-broken mother, the joy of whose existence would vanish with that outgoing eastern train.

"But I may come home again next year, mother dearest? Say I may come then!" pleaded the girl.

"If it seems best," answered Gabriella Trent, tenderly stroking the fair cheek which seemed to have grown thinner and whiter during these last days before this parting.

"Next year? Why, my suz! You won't much more than get there by that time, child alive. Three thousand miles is pretty consid'able of a step, seems if," com-

mented a voice which tried to be as cheerful as it was loud. But the words ended with a sob; that "three thousand miles," which her own fancy had pictured quite breaking down the composure of Aunt Sally Benton, who had come with the rest of the Sobrante party to see Jessica Trent off for the Atlantic coast.

"Blow my stripes! If I ever knew there were so many folks all agog for travelin'! Uneasiest crowd 't ever I see an' noisiest. Well, captain, I hope they'll get talked out 'fore sleeping time comes. If a body *can* sleep aboard a train of cars. Give me a good ship now—then you sing! Here, you fool! What you jostlin' into me for? Think this whole platform belongs to you, just because you're one the know-nothin' towerists?" cried Samson, the mighty herder and one-time sailor, as an anxious "tourist" bumped an armful of luggage against him.

A big crowd it certainly was. Mainly a happy and eager one as well; its winter's outing and sight-seeing over, and home-going at hand. A few, indeed, were sad. Those who had come to California seeking health for some beloved one and failing to find it; leaving the helpless one to take his last sleep in that sunny land, or to carry him eastward to die under native skies.

But amid all the bustle and haste the group from Sobrante was quiet and separate, only Aunt Sally and Samson now and then breaking out into exclamations to relieve their overwrought emotions, and thereby attracting more attention than Mrs. Trent quite enjoyed.

Indeed, she would have preferred to keep these last moments to herself and Jessica alone, but could not.

All the "boys" who could possibly be spared from the ranch had come to Los Angeles to see their little "Captain" depart; although John Benton, the carpenter, emphatically declared:

"It's all a downright mistake. As if our 'Lady Jess' didn't know more now than any 'finished' boardin' school miss could even guess at. Figures? Huh! What does she need more 'n to add up a few wages now an' again, and she's a likely head at that already. Sent 'way off to New York after an education that she could get right here in Californy if her mother'd only think so. I don't hold with no such unnatural separations, I don't."

As to the girl herself, it seemed to all these devoted henchmen that she had grown suddenly older, graver, more dignified, almost careworn. On that very last day of all, when she had made a detailed visit to, and inspection of, every part of the big ranch, she had done so with a quiet, critical interest quite contrary to her usual careless gayety.

"This paddock needs attention, 'boy.' You mustn't let things go to ruin while I'm away nor expect mother to look after them," she had warned one ranchman, in a tone he had never heard her use before. Also, she had gone over his books with the man who now "plucked" the ostriches, whose feathers were such an important factor in the family income, and finding his accounts slightly incorrect had reprimanded him sharply.

It had been altogether another Jessica during these last days; but all felt her altered manner was due wholly to the grief of her home-leaving; and John Benton was

not the only one of the devoted "boys" who considered her departure a mistake.

However, mistake or not, it was now at hand. A distant whistle sounded. The southern San Diego train was coming in, the outgoing overland express stood waiting on the rails before the platform, and by one impulse the whole Sobrante party grouped about the girl for a final kiss or hand-shake. To each and all of them she represented the best of life.

"If anybody harms or tries to harm a hair of your curly yellow head, my Lady Jess, just you telegraph me to once an' I'll take the trail eastward, lickety-cut!" cried George Cromarty, with a suspicious moisture in his usually merry eyes.

"I—I've got a brother yender, in the State o' Maine. Like's not I'll be takin' a trip that way myself, little captain, if I find Sobrante gets too lonesome," said Joe, the smith.

"Be sure you keep that bottle of picra right side up, just the way I fixed it in your satchel, an' take a dose if you feel a mite car sick, or homesick, or——"

"Any other kind of sick!" interrupted John Benton, coolly pushing Aunt Sally aside, that he might get hold of Jessica himself.

"There's dried peach turnovers in that basket an' some my hen chicken's best hard-boiled eggs in Mr. Hale's suit case!" almost screamed Mrs. Benton as the whole party moved forward toward the train. "There's a jar of picked-off roast quail and—Good-by, Jessie Trent! Good-by! Don't take no sass from nobody and do, I beg of you, do keep—your stockin's—mended;

Oh! my stars an' garters! Oh! my! my suz!" wailed the poor woman, as the girl she so dearly loved was swept away from her without even one parting hug.

But Mrs. Trent, to whom this farewell meant more than to any of them, had now no word to say. One silent, prolonged clasp of her daughter's little figure, one light kiss on the pretty lips, and—Jessica was gone!

The dying rumble of the overland seemed a knell of all her happiness and for a moment, as she stood with closed eyes trying to collect herself, she had a reckless impulse to board the next outgoing train and follow on her darling's "trail." Then somebody touched her arm and Ninian Sharp was saying in tones that tried to be cheerful and failed:

"Come, dear madam. Our girl has put you into my especial care and the first thing on the docket is dinner. It was a poor breakfast any of us made and I, for one, am hungry. Come on, boys. It's the Westminster—for all of us. Here? Ready, every one? This car then for you and we'll meet you there. Come, Aunt Sally. Eh? What?"

For as the one-time reporter of the *Lancet*, and now manager of the Sobrante, hailed a carriage to convey Mrs. Trent and Mrs. Benton hotel-ward, the latter fell into a tragic attitude and wildly waved her "reticule" eastward, whither Jessica's train had gone, and as wildly thrust her free hand skyward, exclaiming:

"I'd ought to be kicked by cripples! I certainly had! If I ain't the foolishhest, forgettin'est woman 'twixt the two oceans! An' it's too late now. Oh! my suz a-me!"

Mr. Ninian laughed, and was more grateful to Aunt Sally just then than he had ever been before. Her evident, if comical, distress interrupted sadder thoughts and he promptly demanded, again:

“Well, what’s wrong now, neighbor?”

“Shouldn’t think you, nor no other sensible person ’d want to go ‘neighborin’ me, a body that can’t keep her wits about her no longer ’n what I can. Gabriella Trent, I’ve clean gone, or gone an’ clean forgot, that pink-and-white patchwork-quilt I’ve been settin’ up nights to get ready for Jessie to take with her on the cars, to sleep in! Now—what do you say to that!”

The dramatic dismay on the good woman’s countenance sent Mr. Sharp into a roar of laughter which, this time, was wholly unfeigned, and even brought a smile of amusement to Mrs. Trent’s pale face. The picture her fancy evoked of pretty, fair-haired Jessica, bundled in the patchwork quilt on board a luxurious “sleeper” was so absurd that she forgot, for the moment, other and graver matters.

“No wonder, dear, with all the things you did and looked after, so that we might both leave home—no wonder you forgot. It was very kind of you to take so much trouble for the child, but she’ll not really need the quilt. The beds are well fitted on the sleepers, and Mr. Hale will care for her as if she were his own. Come. We mustn’t keep Mr. Ninian waiting and after dinner he wants me to meet one or two business men. About the mine, you know;” explained Gabriella, entering the carriage, whither Aunt Sally clumsily followed.

Fortunately, that big-hearted creature could always

find a "way out" of most difficulties, and she promptly settled the quilt question, saying:

"Well, if she didn't get it for a keepsake gift, it's hern all the same and she shall have it a-Christmas, and you needn't touch to tell me she shan't. Even if I be to 'Boston,' come that day, an' I have to badger the very life out of my son John to get him to send it to her then. But dinner, Gabriell'! I don't feel as if I could eat a single bite. Do you, yourself, honey?"

This time Ninian felt as if he could shake her. He knew that it would be small appetite, indeed, Mrs. Trent would bring even to that fine menu he meant to lay before her, and here was thoughtless Aunt Sally almost intimating that dining at all would, to-day, be an indecency. So there was more real feeling than appeared in his rejoinder:

"Look here, Mrs. Benton! I wager that with all your present 'suffering' you'll yet be able to make a good square meal. One, maybe, that it'll tax my pocket-book to pay for!"

"Hoity-toity, young man! Who's asked you to pay for my victuals? I didn't; and more'n that it's my intent and cal'lation to pay spot cash not only for what I eat but what Gabrielly does, too, and 'twon't be my fault if she don't get urged to fair stuff herself. So there."

"Good enough, Aunt Sally! You're a—a brick!" retorted this irreverent young man, having succeeded in his efforts at diversion and fully satisfied.

"No, I ain't. I'm a decent human womanbody, that knows when she's sassed at an' when she isn't. And you needn't think you're the only creatur' livin' can look

after Gabriella Trent and them that's dear to her. But—you can't help bein' what you are—a *man!*” The infinite scorn which Mrs. Benton threw into that one word tickled the ex-reporter into another gale of laughter, during which the carriage arrived at the hotel entrance and the group of Sobrante “boys” waiting there.

The sound of it didn't please them. Not in the least. Their own countenances wore an expression befitting a funeral, and the mirth depicted on Ninian Sharp's declared him what they had often felt him to be—a stranger and alien at Sobrante. It wasn't his “little Captain” that had gone and left them desolate. It was their own, idolized “Lady Jess” in whom he had no right nor parcel, even though he had so fully won her love and confidence.

“Well! I've my opinion of a man that can laugh—to-day—after losing Sunny Face!” growled Samson under his breath.

“Light weight! Light weight, in his head. I always said so,” added John Benton, solemn as an owl or—as when he was attempting to lead the Sunday music at Sobrante.

In one glance at their stern faces Ninian Sharp comprehended what was in their minds, and set himself to undo any false impression he had given. That, despite their growls, they liked him he was perfectly sure; also, that though they did indeed sorely feel the loss of the girl they adored they were still human enough to enjoy their present outing in the “City of the Angels,” and—a good dinner!

Handing the ladies over to the care of an obsequious

clerk, he proceeded to line up the ranchmen and to usher them into the big dining-room, with its long array of neatly-spread tables, and toward that corner of it which the head waiter indicated.

Inwardly he enjoyed that brief march from the door to the chairs, each "boy" assuming an air of I-do-this-sort-of-thing-every-day, don't-you-know, and each displaying an awkwardness quite unknown at quiet Sobrante. However, once in their places, and he acting as interpreter of the menu spread before them, they forgot themselves and awaited the feast with scant thought for anything beyond it.

Till, just as Mr. Sharp was rising to rejoin Mrs. Trent and Aunt Sally in another room, he bethought himself to "count noses" and found himself one nose short. One empty chair faced him, one fine old presence was missing:

"Hello, here! Where's 'Forty-niner?' Didn't he come with you from the station?"

The ranchmen stared at him and at each other; then said John Benton, gravely:

"I remember now, he didn't. Plaguyest proud old chap ever handled a shotgun. Wouldn't be beholden to anybody for even one dinner. Well! He's had experience of Los Angeles an' ought to know his bearings. Might ha' stepped round to that hospital he's forever talking about, or to that old crony tavern-keeper's o' his'n. But he'll turn up before train starts for Marion and home. Couldn't keep him off Sobrante ranch though you set the dogs on him. Thinks none of us, that's a mite younger 'n him, has got sense enough to run things

without his everlasting poke-nose thrust in. Lady Jess, she was pleased to tell him she'd made him 'Superintendent' of the whole shooting-match an' that was one time our 'Captain' made a little mistake. But he's sort of touchy like and if he gets too top-lofty we can easy set him down a peg. I'd like some butter, waiter; and I'd like enough to *see*, this time."

So saying, the carpenter cast a casual glance around, as if to convey to all spectators the fact that he was perfectly familiar with hotel tables and the manner of dining thereat. The glance included the young mine manager, but this time that gentleman's sense of humor was not touched. A vague uneasiness stirred within him, and it was his ardent hope that when the home-returning party took the train for Marion the old sharpshooter would rejoin them.

"Mrs. Trent will be grieved if he forsakes Sobrante now that Jessica is gone. The old man *is* 'touchy,' as the boys say; and he has never quite forgiven his old mates for that temporary doubt of his honesty. The 'house' will be lonely, indeed, if neither he nor the little 'Captain' goes in and out of it. Yes, I hope he'll be on hand; and till that time I'll not mention him to the lady of the ranch."

However, when—dinner past and business transacted—the Sobrante household gathered at the station, *en route* for home, old Ephraim Marsh was still absent from his rightful place; and to Mrs. Trent's anxious exclamation:

"Why 'Forty-niner' hasn't come yet! We can't possibly go and leave him behind! Does anybody know where he is?" there was no reply save the warning

whistle of the locomotive and the conductor's hoarse command: "All aboard!"

"Till Aunt Sally fancied a solution, crying:

"My suz! I believe he's gone an' broke another leg!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TOURIST CAR.

FOR a time after the train pulled out from the station at Los Angeles, Jessica Trent saw nothing for the mist of tears which blurred her eyes; save that framed in that mist was the sad, beautiful face of her mother. How pale it had been! Yet how quiet the dear voice bidding her "be worthy" of that dead father, whose representative she must be. For his sake she was to be educated. For his sake, to carry out his high ideals, she had had to leave her home and "learn life."

"That was it, more than books, my mother said. 'Life.' As if there were not the best sort of life at dear Sobrante!" she murmured, fancying the loud "chug-chug" of the train would cover her voice.

To her surprise it had not. For Mr. Hale answered as if she had spoken aloud to him:

"Suppose you begin to learn it right now and here, my little maid. There are dozens of people in this car and each one is very much alive. See that odd old lady in the second section beyond ours. She seems to be in trouble of some sort and is quite alone. She's bobbed under her seat a half-dozen times already, yet comes up empty-handed every time. You might ask her if you can help."

For Mr. Hale was wise enough to know that the best

and surest way of curing one's own discontent is by relieving that of somebody else.

For once Jessica was not inspired by the idea of helping somebody. She was far more inclined to sit still in her comfortable place and think about things it were better she should forget—just for a little time. Sobrante, little Ned and Luis, Buster her beloved mount, the glorious garden behind the “house”—Oh! to think each mile she journeyed, each turn of those ceaseless wheels, carried her further and further away!

“Now, dear! I'm really afraid the poor old soul will hurt herself and she's rung for the porter times without end, yet he doesn't come. Will you, or shall I?”

Indeed, Mr. Hale had already half-risen and only delayed to offer his services because he knew it better for Jessica to be roused from her brooding. Fortunately, her good breeding conquered her reluctance and, a moment later, guiding herself along the aisle of the swaying car, she reached the old lady's side and asked:

“Beg pardon, madam, but have you lost something? Can I help you look for it?”

The traveler rose so suddenly from her stooping posture that her stiff, old-fashioned bonnet slipped to the back of her neck and imparted a wild, rakish effect to her peculiar attire. The bonnet was so big and deep, of that shape known as “poke,” and the face it framed was so wizened and small that Jessica could think of nothing but some fairy-tale witch.

“Oh! but Sissy, me dear! Sure 'tis the kind child you are! Arrah musha! But I've lost me fine new gum

shoes, what Barney, me son, gave me this very day whatever. 'With your rubbers and umberell, mother,' says he, 'sure you'll be makin' the trip in fine style, and be all forehanded again' the bad sort of weather you'll be meetin' th' other side this big counthry,' says he. And now I've lost them entire, and the umberell—Here 'tis. Now ain't that a fine one, Sissy dear?"

"Why, yes. I guess so. I don't know much about umbrellas we need them so seldom in California. But the rubbers—I'll look under the seat. I can, easier than you. I'm young—smaller, I mean."

"Not so much smaller, me dear, though younger by some fifty-odd year I've no doubt. Bless your bonny face! Found them ye have. Thank you, me child, and wait—here's a reward for your goodness, be sure. Sit by till you eat it. 'Twould do me old heart good, so being it aches like a grumblin' tooth the now. Leavin' Barney and the nice wife and the bairns, as I have. Crossin' this big counthry all by my lone; and after that the ocean; an' all that long way just to look upon old Ireland once more and them in it I hold so dear. Barney's but one; in Ireland are three. One is a nun and cannot; one is a priest and will not; and one is a wife and must not come over to me in this purty land of Ameriky. Was ever in old Ireland, me dear?"

Almost unconsciously Jessica had obeyed the old lady's invitation to share the wide seat with herself and had smilingly accepted the half of a mint drop which her new acquaintance offered.

"Eat it slow and it'll last you a long time, me dear. I always carry a few sweeties in my pocket for the chil-

dher ; but mayhap 'twould do no harm were you to have the other bit, seein's you was so good as to help an old body."

So saying, and with a smile that softened the rugged old face, Barney's mother carefully deposited the second half of the mint on Jessica's knee.

"Thank you. It is very nice," said the girl, smiling herself at thought of Ned's disgust in being offered but one piece of candy, and that with such an air of generosity.

"You're a fair lookin' little maid, me dear, an' what might your name be?"

"Jessica Trent."

"And your home, lassie? Where's that at?" queried this stranger with friendly curiosity. "And be you, too, travelin' by your lone in these steam cars? Why for and where to? Sure, if so be, and our roads lie together a bit we might bear one another company. 'Twould do me old heart good to keep your bonny face alongside till the pain of this partin' from Barney eases up a trifle. A good lad, is he, and forehanded enough, Heaven prosper him! Free with the gold to pay the toll of my journey—Whisht, alanna! I've five hundred dollars sewed in me petticoat! Mind that, Jessica Trent, and mintion it to none!"

The last information was given in a sibilant whisper, that might have been heard by other ears than Jessica's, and was to her so wonderful that she stared in astonishment. This plainly-dressed old lady carrying so much money? Who would have dreamed it?

"Me own name is Dalia Mary Moriarty. Me son

Barney, he come to Ameriky when but a tiny bairn, along with Dennis me man. To Californy Dennis went, to a place called Riverside, an' a gardener by trade went into oranges an' olives. The blessin' of Heaven was on him an' he prospered, even as Barney himself has done. But 'twas not till Dennis stepped into another world, the world beyant this, me dear, that I left Connemara an' follyed here. A nice town, 'tis to be sure, but not like Ireland. There's no land that ever I see can match old Ireland for richness an' greenness, me dear. Here in Californy 'tis all the talk of 'irrigatin',' 'irrigatin'!' Nought grows without that costly 'irrigatin',' but in me own true land the water is given with the crops by the same free Hand above. Sure, I'll be glad to get me home to a spot where I'll be let toss out a dipper of water without bein' bid: 'Don't waste it, mother! Remember the garden!' As if I was ever let to forget it!" The old lady paused for breath, then added: "But 'tis kind they was, each and ivery one. Now, all about your own self, me dear, if so be there's none waitin' you to leave me an' tend them."

Jessica turned her head and saw that Mr. Hale had settled himself for a nap, so replied:

"Mr. Hale has gone to sleep so he will not need me for a time. He is the lawyer gentleman who is taking me across the continent to my mother's cousin in New York. I am to live with her till I am educated enough to go back to Sobrante ranch, my home. My father is dead. My mother is the most beautiful gentlewoman in—in the world, I guess. I have the dearest little brother Ned—Edward, his real name is. Besides him, we have a

little adopted one, Luis Maria Manuel Alessandro Garcia, and his father is dead too."

"Saints save us! So will the bairn be soon if he has to shoulder that great name! Sounds like some them old Spaniard folkse that crop up, now an' again, round Riverside way! But go on, me dear. 'Tis most interestin' to hear tell of your folks, and so be as that you're travelin' to that same city of Ne' York, where I take ship for home, we'll be pleasin' company for one another, so we will."

Jessica was not so sure of that. By the jolting of the car the new gum shoes had again fallen to the floor and disappeared beneath the seat; and again she was bidden, rather peremptorily to:

"Seek them, child! seek them quick! If we should come to one them meal-stations, an' they not in hand, however could I leave the car?"

Overshoes were articles the little Californian had rarely seen and never owned and, glancing out of window at the sunny landscape, she exclaimed:

"Why, what can you want of two pairs of shoes on your feet at one time? Besides, it's past the rainy season and——"

"Tut, child! Would have me neglect the last gift of me Barney son? Out of this car I steps not at all without both me umbrell an' me gum shoes. Meal-stations, or whatever. Mind that! An' 'tis them same what give the only bit of exercise possible on these week-long journeys, you know. 'Get out at every stoppin' place, mother, an' stretch your tired legs with a tramp up an' down them station platforms,' says me boy, Barney."

Jessica once more restored the overshoes and for the comfort of both suggested that they be tied fast to the old lady's wrist by a string. Also, she began to feel that a whole week of this companion's society would be hard to endure, despite the certain friendliness of Mrs. Moriarty. Fortunately, just then, a whistle sounded and the train began to slow up at a station. This roused Mr. Hale to come forward and, with a courteous bow to the old lady, bid Jessica:

"Come, dear. We stop here long enough to take on water; and I'll show you some interesting things about this great overland train."

Already the novelty of her surroundings had banished, for the time, the homesickness of Jessica's heart. Everything was "interesting" indeed; from the great water tank with its canvas pipe for filling the engine-boiler, to the crowded baggage cars. As the stop was for several minutes, nearly everybody left the carriages, to pace swiftly up and down for the relief of seat-weary muscles, or to enter the small dining-room to snatch a hasty lunch. The place was already packed with hungry humanity and passing its window, Mr. Hale complacently remarked:

"Blessing on Aunt Sally and her fine cooking! As soon as the train moves on again we'll sample her basket. The food will be good for a day or so but after that we, too, will have to trust to meal-stations, except on those stretches of the road where a dining-car is attached. Now, let's look at the great engine, and make acquaintance, if we can, with the skillful engineer who holds our lives in his hands. A moment's carelessness on his

part means great danger to us, and his faithfulness is worth far greater reward than it ever attains. Another bit for your memory book: a single engine is run but a comparatively short part of our long journey. Coming to California, I learned that we had changed engines just fourteen times. Those, yonder, are the tourist-cars; less luxurious than the Pullman we travel in and cheaper. For the benefit of the many who cannot afford first-class. By the way, it would be a nice plan to enter the last end of the train and make our way forward, from car to car, till we reach our own seats in the 'Arizona'—as our sleeper is called."

So they did; and Jessica thought she had never seen anything so wonderful as this traveling disclosed. Especially was she interested in the "tourist" carriages; for until now she had associated that word with the wealthy, rather impertinent persons who made southern California a winter amusement ground and had none too much respect for the rights of residents whose ranches they visited. One such group, she well remembered, had driven over Sobrante as if it had been a public park, or with even greater freedom, since its temporarily absent mistress returned to find her garden despoiled of its floral treasures.

"Tourist" now began to stand for other things, in this young traveler's mind. For weary mothers, cooking scant messes for their fretful babies upon the great stove in the corner of the car; for bare seats, sometimes heaped with all sorts of household belongings; for, indeed, a glimpse of that poverty to which the strict economies of Sobrante seemed actual luxury.

"Why, how different it is from our place in the 'Arizona!' I never, never, saw so many children! How they do cry! How hot and tired the mothers look! Oh! can't I do something for somebody?" cried the girl, actually distressed by the discomfort about her.

"I wouldn't interfere, dear. They might not like it. Besides, it's not so bad as this all the time. We're only beginning the long trip. After a little, things adjust themselves. People become accustomed to their cramped surroundings and acquainted with one another. By the time we reach the other side the continent, here and in our own car, we will seem like one big family—so friendly we shall grow, and so many mutually interesting things we shall find by the way;" said Mr. Hale. Then added, rather suddenly: "Why, Jessica, child! What are you doing now?"

What, indeed! This inspection of the train, begun in simple curiosity, was having a startling ending. At the extreme rear of the car they were in sat an old man, fondling a shrieking infant and vainly endeavoring to quiet it for the frail young mother who looked helplessly on. Too weak and ill she was to do more than fix her eyes upon the child and to rest her head against the uncushioned back of the seat, while the gray-haired man—Could he have been the baby's grandfather? If so he showed little skill at nursing, for the more he petted and pitied the small creature, the more it wriggled and yelled.

Just as there sounded from outside the conductor's order: "All aboard!" and the people came hurrying

back into the car, Jessica forced her way among them to where the old man sat and catching the baby from his arms, cried in a very ecstasy of joy:

“O you blessed old ‘Forty-niner!’ That isn’t the way to hold a baby! see me!”

CHAPTER III.

THE LONG JOURNEY ENDS.

Mr. Hale never forgot that railway trip.

To rouse Jessica Trent from her sorrow at leaving home he had suggested her helping others; and so thoroughly did she follow his advice that he soon had a dozen people depending upon him for counsel and comfort. Quoth that young traveler, in the very presence of the ailing mother of the tourist car:

"We are so much better off in our 'Arizona,' dear Mr. Hale. Let's take this poor little woman and this precious baby right back there with us. She can have my own soft seat with you and I can sit with Mrs. Moriarty, as she wanted me to do. Dear Mr. Marsh—Well, he must be with us in there, too. If he loved me so well he would hide away from the others and come all the way to the other ocean, just because he couldn't live without me, course, I can't live without him. Why he didn't tell them was—was just because."

"Probably a satisfactory reason to him and seems to be to you, Miss Jessica. Yet what's to become of him in New York? Don't for a moment imagine your future hostess, Mrs. Dalrymple, will have him at her house. From all I've heard of her she's a woman of strong opinions and one of them is that it will be better for

you to cut loose from your western companions for a time."

Jessica regarded him with some surprise, but her confidence was not shaken.

"Oh! you see, she doesn't know 'Forty-niner.' I suppose she's read stories about cowboys and such things; and my father used to say that the stories were mostly exag—exaggerated, and written by people who'd never been west in their lives. Fancy! Writing a book about men one never saw! Anyway, Cousin Margaret is sure to like Ephraim Marsh. Nobody could help it."

Meanwhile, the sharpshooter had settled himself most comfortably in the 'Arizona,' occupying any seat which happened to be vacant for the moment and quietly retiring to his rightful berth in the "tourist car" when bedtime came. The ailing mother had accepted Jessica's place and berth in Mr. Hale's section, and the little girl herself had joined forces with Mrs. Moriarty.

Jessica had had a reasonable sum of money given her, when she left Sobrante, her mother believing it would add to that womanly training she needed to have charge of it; and without consulting her present guardian the girl had given the sick woman enough of her fund to pay the different rate of fare.

It was too late for Mr. Hale to object, and he was too polite to do so. The utmost he could accomplish was to warn his charge to expend nothing more without his advice, and to pass as much of his time in the smoker as was possible. Fortunately, the baby was a happy child, when physically comfortable; and it was a good

sleeper; so that the lawyer's fear of being kept awake at night, by having it in the lower berth, proved groundless.

By the end of the second day out Jessica and the baby, which she carried everywhere, had become the life of the train; "going visiting" in one car after another, making friends in each, and feeling almost as if they were always to journey thus amid these now familiar faces. But all journeys end in time, and as they drew nearer and nearer to the eastern coast, one after another these fellow travelers departed at some stopping-place, nearest their homes.

"Why, it seems as if there was nothing in this world but just to say 'Good-by!'" cried Jessica, tearfully, when the hour came for baby and its mother to leave the "Arizona."

"Never mind, dearie, you've made it a pleasant trip for me, and it's a little world. We may meet again; but if we don't, just you keep on shedding sunshine and you'll never be sad for long," said the invalid, herself grieved to part with the little Californian yet grateful to have reached her own home alive.

Then almost before she knew it, the week-long trip had ended. The train steamed into the great station in Jersey City, those who had come "all the way across" gathered their belongings, submitted to be brushed and freshened from the stains of the long trip, hurriedly bade one another good-by and were gone. Even Mrs. Moriarty had time for but a single hug and the bestowal of a whole mint drop ere she was captured by a red-faced Irishwoman in a redder bonnet, who called her "Cousin

Dalia," and bore her away through the crowd toward that waiting steamer which should carry her onward to her beloved Ireland.

Jessica watched her go and caught her breath with a sob. It sent a sharp pain through her heart to find that she seemed the only one for whom a joyful welcome was not waiting; and she almost resented Mr. Hale's blithe voice and manner as he laid his hand on her shoulder and demanded:

"What? Tears in your eyes, little maid? Are you so sorry to have done with those tiresome cars and to be on solid ground again? My! But it's raining a deluge!"

"Raining? Why—how can it now, so late, in the very middle of April! But isn't it good Grandma Moriarty did have the gum shoes, after all?"

"Humph! Good enough for her, but how about ourselves, eh? As for 'raining in April,' that's just the orthodox state of the weather here in the east. Never mind. A carriage will take us safely enough to your cousin's house. This way, please. Have you your satchel? Porter, take it and these. Now come. I'm as glad as a schoolboy to be at home again—or so near it that the first suburban train will carry me to it. Six months since I saw my wife and daughters! That's a big slice out of a man's life."

He was so glad, indeed, that his usual thoughtfulness for others gave place to personal considerations; and he forgot that to his young companion this was not a joyful return but a dreaded beginning.

"This way, Jessica! Step in, please, out of the wet!"

The girl obeyed and entered the carriage, and though she had checked her tears she felt she had never seen anything so dismal as that great wharf, with its dripping vehicles, nor heard anything so dreadful as the cries of the angry drivers, jostling each other in the storm.

Then they drove on to the ferry-boat and there a thunder shower burst upon that region such as had not been known there for many a day. To the little Californian, fresh from that thunderless *Paraiso d'Oro*, it seemed as if the end of the world might be at hand; and she cowered against Mr. Hale who slipped his arm caressingly about her. At last he had begun to understand something of her loneliness and blamed himself that he had not done so earlier.

"Well, little girl, does this frighten you? To me it is delightful. At present so fierce, this electric storm will clear the air of all impurity, and by the time we reach Washington Square, where Mrs. Dalrymple lives, we shall have almost Californian sunshine. Just think! Though you have never seen her she is your very own 'blood relation.' She knew your mother when she, too, was a little maid like yourself. I confess I should have liked to know that lady then myself. She must have been a model of all girlish sweetness, as she is now of womanly graces. To grow up such a gentlewoman as Mrs. Trent—that's why you are breasting a thunder-storm here in New York to-day. Hark! That peal wasn't quite so loud as the others. The storm is rapidly passing eastward and the clouds are lightening. Now look out

of the window and get your first glimpse of our biggest American city. Not the finest part, by any means, but every part is interesting to me."

Thus advised Jessica peered through the rain-splashed glass into that crowded west-side avenue, where it seemed as if the never-ending line of drays and wagons, the clanging street cars, the roar of the "elevated" trains above, and the shouts and screams of all the teamsters, was pandemonium indeed. She did not find the outlook at all "interesting," as the loyal citizen had described it, but most confusing and terrifying. If this were New York, however should she be able to endure it?

With a down sinking of her heart, and a homesickness quite too deep for tears, the "little Captain" leaned back and closed her eyes, while her fancy pictured that far away Sobrante, lying bathed in sunshine and in a peacefulness so wholly in contrast to this dreadful city. Memories of her home recalled the fact that Ephraim, a part of her old world, was not with her now and that in the confusion of leaving the train she had quite forgotten him. This sent her upright again, startled and eager, to say:

"Why, Mr. Hale! How terrible! We've *forgotten* 'Forty-niner!' we must go right back and get him!"

"Impossible. He should have been on the lookout for us and kept us in sight. Besides, if we did go back we couldn't find him. New York crowds are always changing and he'd move on with the rest. Doubtless, he thinks it easy to overtake us anywhere here."

Jessica was hurt. She could not realize how greatly

tried the lawyer had been by many of her thoughtless actions during their long journey, nor how impatient he was now to be free from his care of her and away to his own household. His irritation was perfectly natural, and, secretly, he was extremely glad that they had thus easily lost the sharpshooter. It was a most satisfactory way out of the difficulty in appearing at Mrs. Dalrymple's house with the veteran ranchman in train. That she would decline to receive Mr. Marsh, he was quite sure; in which case he would himself have been left with the old fellow upon his hands, to care for in some way till he could be expressed back to Sobrante. Yes, he was certainly relieved; but he did not enjoy the reproachful glance which his young charge bestowed upon him as he spoke. After a moment she asked:

"Will carriages take you anywhere you want to go, here in this big place? Can you hire one for money, just as in our dear Los Angeles, when Mr. Ninian got one to take us from one station to the other? Could a little girl hire one, herself?"

"Why, of course; but Jessica, dear child, get no silly notions into your head of running about this city alone—even in a public hack. Within a very few moments I shall hand you over to the care of your future guardian and you will have to be guided by her in everything. Nor need you worry about Ephraim. He's an old campaigner, has a tongue to ask questions with, and this is a decent community. He'll look out for himself well enough. There! A half-dozen more blocks and we shall have arrived!"

Jessica could not answer. She turned her head aside and carefully studied the street through which they were passing. It looked hopelessly like others they had left. The houses bordering it were so tall and close together that they seemed to take up all the air, leaving none for her to breathe. It was a great relief when they came to an open square and stopped before a big house fronting upon it.

"Ah! I fancied this was the place! One of our old landmarks—and very few are left. How fine for you to come to live here, child! I almost envy you the distinction," cried the New Yorker, with enthusiasm, as he stepped from the carriage and turned to help Jessica out.

But she was already on the pavement, staring eagerly at her new home and seeing nothing so remarkable as Mr. Hale fancied about it. It was some larger than the other houses near, almost twice as wide, indeed; and it stood somewhat back from the street, guarded by a sharp-pointed iron fence and an imposing gate. Two rather rusty iron lions couched before the entrance, on the brown stone steps, but time had softened their once fierce expression to a sort of grin which could frighten nobody—not even a stranger from *Paraiso d'Oro*. On both sides of the mansion was a stretch of green grass, a rare feature in a city where every foot of ground was so precious, and that spoke much for the obstinacy of its possessor who must repeatedly have refused to part with it for building purposes.

So absorbed in looking at the mansion were both the lawyer and Jessica that they scarcely heard the murmur of voices behind them, where their jehu was quietly dis-

cussing and arranging a little matter of business with a man who had ridden beside himself on his coachman's seat; nor, till they passed through the iron gateway and ascended the steps, did they realize that the man, also, had followed.

Then Mr. Hale turned his head and uttered a cry of regret. But Jessica, likewise turning, felt nothing but joy as she flung herself upon Ephraim Marsh, standing "at attention," as composed and at ease as if he were waiting his mistress's commands upon the porch at Sobrante.

"Why, Marsh! *you*—here?" cried the lawyer. "We—Miss Jessica feared she had lost you."

"She needn't have. She couldn't. She'll never lose me till the grave covers me," answered the sharpshooter, solemnly.

"O Ephy! don't speak of graves, right here at the beginning of things! And oh! how glad I am to have you, how glad, how glad! You're a real bit of dear Sobrante and give me courage!"

The great key turned in the door-lock, a bolt or two shot back and the door swung on its mighty hinges; slowly and cautiously at first, then with more confidence as the attendant saw nothing formidable in these visitors. They seemed to be a gentleman, a soldier, and a little girl, where he had anticipated beggars or burglars, or worse.

"Is Mrs. Dalrymple at home? This is Miss Jessica Trent, of California, whom the lady expects; and I am—this is my card. Mr. Marsh, also, of California—and——"

Mr. Hale paused then motioning Jessica forward followed whither the old butler led the way; "Forty-niner" bringing up the rear with his stiffest military stride and most impassive expression.

They were ushered into a great room at the back of the house. Its long windows were opened upon an iron balcony, from which a flight of steps ran down into what once had been a charming garden but was now a neglected wilderness. The room itself was oppressive from its crowding furniture, dust-covered and dark in tone, and a faded carpet strewn with much litter added to the unpleasant effect. Till suddenly Jessica discovered that the carpet had once been a "picture." An old time hunting scene with horses and people and dogs galore; where some of the horses had lost their heads, the dogs their tails, and the red coats of the huntsmen had suffered much—through the tread of feet during years and years of time.

Nevertheless, she was down upon her knees examining it, calling attention to this detail or that, till the silence in which they had been left was broken by the sound of a tap-tap along the hall and the old butler reappeared, announcing:

"Madam Dalrymple."

Mr. Hale rose and advanced, "Forty-niner" made his best "salute," but Jessica neither moved nor spoke. She could only gaze with fascination at the figure standing between the portieres and wait what next. That an "old lady"? *That!*

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE ANCIENT MANSION.

"My cousin Jessica! I bid you welcome. Studying my wonderful old carpet, I see. Your mother did that before you, child, and many another Waldron besides her. Mr. Hale, I am happy to meet you. Be seated, please. This other gentleman——"

"Ephraim Marsh, at your sarvice, Ma'am. I belong to Miss Trent. I'm from Sobrante with her, Ma'am."

Mr. Hale waited with much interest for what might follow this statement, but was unprepared for the gracious suavity of Madam Dalrymple, of whose temper he had heard much. With a kindly, if patronizing, smile she waved Ephraim aside, directing her own old servitor to:

"Take Marsh below, Tipkins, and see that he has refreshments."

Evidently, the Madam had accepted the sharpshooter as a correct feature of the situation, considering that it was the mark of a gentlewoman to be well attended; and as the two old men left the room he wondered how "Forty-niner" himself would relish being classed with the servants "below stairs." However, Ephraim cared not one whit for that. He had attained his ambition. He had come east to share in educating his "little Cap-

tain" and he was now assigned to a home in the same house with her. "Hooray!" was his thought; and, further, that as soon as one other small matter was settled he would sit him down and write a letter to the other "boys" that would make them stare.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Dalrymple sank gracefully into a deep chair, displaying no sign of the intense pain each movement cost her and physically unable to stand for a moment longer. Thence she held out a thin white hand toward the girl who had not yet risen from the floor, nor left off staring at the lady before her—so wholly different from the picture she had formed of the "stern old woman" with whom she was to live.

Now blushing at her own rudeness, which she was sure the other had observed, she rose and came slowly forward and took the extended hand. Poor hand! So white, yet with such cruelly gnarled and swollen joints! There was no kiss proffered from either side; even impulsive Jessica feeling that she would no more dare touch that person in the arm-chair than she would a bit of the most delicate, and forbidden, porcelain.

"Thank you for welcoming me, Cousin Margaret; if I am to call you that?" said "Lady Jess," all the wonder and admiration she felt showing in her face.

"Certainly, my dear. We are second-cousins twice removed."

"Then, Cousin Margaret, my mother sends you her dear love and great respect; and I am to obey you in all things—all things that I can; and I am to do for you whatever you will let me."

With that, having ended her little speech as duly in-

structed by her mother, Jessica folded her arms across her bosom and tossed back her yellow curls, in a characteristic gesture, now wholly familiar to Mr. Hale, but which to a stranger had a little air of defiance. So Mrs. Dalrymple interpreted it, and with some amusement asked:

"You make some reservation of your obedience, then, do you, Cousin Jessica? Like Gabriella herself. Meaning, maybe, to obey me when and only when it suits your mood to do so. Very well; we shall understand each other perfectly; and those who understand know how to avoid collision. Be assured, we shall never quarrel, little cousin."

Jessica was troubled. She felt she had expressed herself badly and offended this wonderful lady whom she longed to have love her, and who seemed so little inclined to do so. She hastened to explain:

"I meant only if you should happen to tell me to do something that I felt wasn't right—or that is different from what my mother likes—or, oh! dear! Please *do* understand what I want to say, for, truly, it was nothing naughty!"

Madam Dalrymple laughed, and answered:

"Your words, little cousin, are but another instance of the fact that explanations are the most hopeless things in this world. When Gabriella left me she, too, tried to 'explain' and failed to make a bit of change in the bare truth. She left me because she wished. You'll disobey me, if you do, because you wish. That's the matter in a nutshell. One thing I'll make clear at the beginning: I shall lay no unnecessary commands upon you, and I

shall insist that you remember everywhere and always that you are a—*Waldron*. You belong to a race that has high ideals and lives up to them. Ah! yes! One other thing. I don't care for demonstrations of affection. We have not come together because we are, or ever will be, fond of one another; but because we are both *Waldrons* and the time is fitting.

“Ah! must you leave us, Mr. Hale? Beg pardon for not—not having attended more to you than to the child there; and thank you for your safe escort of her. I shall write my cousin Gabriella at once and inform her that Jessica has arrived. Good morning.”

Mr. Hale bowed himself out, feeling almost as if he were deserting his traveling companion to a most unhappy fate. For a girl like “Lady Jess” to be housed with Madam Dalrymple seemed a bitter thing. The child had lived in the sunshine, materially and spiritually, and the gloom of that old mansion in Washington Square had been oppressive even to him and during such a brief stay. And for the first time since he had discovered “Forty-niner” a runaway on the train he was thankful for his presence.

“There's a trio of stubborn wills shut up in that dark house, this minute, for even Miss Jessie has a will of her own; as for those of the Madam and Ephraim, should they happen to clash, I wonder which would conquer! However, I've done with them, for the present, and now for home and my own dear girls!” thought the lawyer, as he reëntered the waiting carriage and was driven toward the station which led to his own home, a few miles north of town.

Madam Dalrymple made a slight motion to rise and dropped the slender cane which had rested against her chair, and the "tap-tapping" of which had announced her coming through the hall. Instantly, Jessica had picked it up and restored it, and was as promptly thanked. Moreover the lady's eyes, still marvelously dark and bright for one so old, rested with an interested expression on the young face before them.

"That was well thought, Cousin Jessica. Your mother must have trained you better than I feared, living so in the wilderness."

"Oh! it isn't a wilderness, not in the least. It is the most beautiful spot in all the world! New York can't compare with our lovely Sobrante—not compare! And I hope she didn't have to 'train' me to do a thing like that, which nobody could help doing, could they?"

"Came naturally, eh? Better still. Sit down. It tires me to see you standing. Luncheon will be served at one and it is almost that time now. Sit down and tell me about your journey—or anything you choose. Only speak low. I observe that by nature, if you are not excited, your voice is fairly good. Gentlewomen are never noisy nor obtrusive. Remember that."

Jessica would rather have remained standing, or, better still, have stepped through the long open window out into that rain-drenched old garden, a-glitter now in the sunshine that was almost as bright as Sobrante's. But she reflected that here was her first chance to "obey" and placed herself on a low stool near her hostess, fixing her gaze upon the lady's face with a curiosity that failed to offend, it was so full of admiration. Yet finding that

serene scrutiny somewhat trying, Mrs. Dalrymple herself opened the conversation by asking:

"Does Gabriella, your mother, keep her good looks? Or is she faded from that rude life she leads and the sorrow she has met?"

"Faded? My—mother—faded? Why, how queer! Cousin Margaret Dalrymple, she is almost the most beautiful woman in all southern California. Truly! Mr. Ninian says so, and Mr. Hale did, and—and I think so! She is just like the Madonna picture in Fra Sebastian's house, she is so lovely. Her hair—her hair isn't quite as white as yours, it is a beautiful dark gold color—but she has almost as much as you. She doesn't wear it in that puffed up, frizzly kind of way, but just turns it back in one big coil that is—is lovely."

Mrs. Dalrymple slightly winced. She did wear a profusion of snow-white locks, as became a venerable woman of fashion, and Jessica was not wise enough, as yet, to know that such headgear may be bought in a shop and put on or off at will. The next question followed rather soon and sharply:

"Does she still sing? She once had a charming voice."

"Oh! it is like the birds in the trees along the arroyo to hear my mother sing! She doesn't often now, it makes her think so much of my father. Why, all the 'boys' say that it was something wonderful when they two sang together of a Sunday morning, or sometimes at night. John Benton said it was as near like the music of Heaven as anything on the earth could be. John is very religious, John is; only, sometimes, when Aunt Sally tries his patience very much he says—he says

things that don't sound nice. But Samson is religiouser even than John. They're both of them just perfectly splendid 'boys.' Oh! all our 'boys' are fine, just fine! You'd love them every one!" answered Jessica with enthusiasm.

"Humph! I was never any too fond of 'boys,' and Gabriella must be crazy to try and run a ranch by the aid of a few 'boys.' Why doesn't she employ men, if so be she will persist in living in such an outlandish place?"

"Little Captain" smiled.

"Well, I suppose they're not exactly real boys, like Ned or Luis. They're quite grown up and gray-headed, most of them. They all worked for my father, who found them scattered about the world, sort of 'down on their luck,' as Marty says, and brought them all to dear Sobrante to give them a home and 'another chance.' They just about worshipped my father, I guess, and I know they do my darling mother. Oh! I wish you could see her!"

"It is wholly her own fault that I cannot. Here comes Tipkins to announce luncheon, and I have quite forgotten that you should have been taken to your room to freshen yourself after your journey. Odd! that Gabriella should have sent a man and not a maid with you. But I suppose she knew I would prefer one of my own selection, here in the east."

"Oh! She didn't *send* Ephraim. He—he just came because he loved me so and wouldn't stay behind. He—Why dear old 'Forty-niner' actually ran away! Fancy! Just as the *little* boys so love to do."

"Humph! A strange life, a strange bringing up you

seem to have had. Tipkins, send Barnes to attend Miss Jessica."

"Yes, Madam, I'll—try," replied the old servant, bowing and withdrawing upon the errand. Both he and his mistress well knew that Barnes, my lady's maid, was rarely "sent" upon any errand her own will did not dictate, and that she had more than once declared, since the coming of Jessica had been decided upon, that "the Madam needn't go for to expect me to 'tend upon no brats at my time of life, nor she needn't ask it. If she does I'll give notice and that'll settle *her*."

However, curiosity often accomplishes what authority cannot; and because Tipkins had reported below stairs that "our Miss Gabriella's little daughter looks like a hangel out of Heaven," and the sharpshooter had treated her maidship with such profound reverence, upon being presented as "Miss Jessica's man"—the arbitrary Barnes condescended to obey the present summons.

Mrs. Dalrymple had made a slight effort to rise from her chair and Jessica had already sprung forward to help her, when the white-capped and white-haired maid appeared; but the lady now sank back again, directing:

"Show Miss Jessica to her room, Barnes, please, and help her to make what slight change is necessary now. Her luggage can be unpacked before dinner. I will wait here for her."

"Luncheon is served, Madam," remonstrated the maid, rather sharply.

"It can be put back. I will wait for you here," returned the mistress with equal sharpness.

With a sniff and a bridling of her head Barnes de-

parted, bidding Jessica: "This way, please, and mind the stairs. All this twaddle about old things being better'n new and risking mortals' legs on rags, beats me. Hmm. Some folks grow queerer as they grow older, some does."

Jessica followed in wondering silence and, although warned to "mind the stairs," caught her toe in the frayed covering of one and fell. But she was up again as soon as down and without quite understanding why was indignant with her guide for the slighting tone in which she spoke. Certainly, the carpet had once been a very fine one. Even now, where an unbroken spot appeared, the foot sank deep into a mossy greenness that was delightful, and fully bore out the vivid description of this old home which her mother had sometimes given her.

But even in Mrs. Trent's own girlhood days the furnishings of this ancient mansion had become worn almost to uselessness, and the years which had elapsed since then had finished the work of destruction. In truth, all the floor coverings were now but what Barnes called "man traps," where unwary feet would be caught and falls result.

"'Twas one of them same holes the Madam caught her own high heel in and got an injury was the beginning of her lameness. The doctor calls it 'gout,' he does; but I, well, I calls it 'pride,' just plain, senseless, family pride. Whatever *was*, my lady thinks, is far and away better nor what *is*. But as for me and the rest of the servants, give us even the cheapest sort of 'ingrain,' providing it was new and we'd feel safer for our old bones. Well, here is your room, Miss, and if you'll let me slip off your frock I'll soon make you tidy."



"Thence she held out a thin white hand toward the girl who had not yet risen from the floor."
(See page 41)

Had Jessica known it this was a fine concession on the part of ever-weary Barnes, who acknowledged to her advancing age with a frankness which her mistress denied, but she looked so tired from her climb up the long stairs that the girl promptly exclaimed:

"Oh! Don't you trouble, please, Mrs. Barnes. I can wait upon myself quite well. Indeed, I never have anybody to wait upon me, except now and then my darling mother—just for love's sake." Then with a swift recollection of the tenderness those motherly fingers had shown, even in the matter of buttoning or unbuttoning a frock, her blue eyes grew moist and for a moment that dreadful homesickness made her turn half-faint.

Now old Barnes was neither dense nor unkind. She was merely spoiled. She had domineered over her fractious mistress since both of them were young and she really felt that she was of more authority in the house than its owner. She and Tipkins had entered service together, at the time of Mrs. Dalrymple's early marriage, and like the storied "brook" they "had gone on forever." Dozens, maybe hundreds, of other servants had "flowed" through the mansion and few had tarried long. None save these two original servitors willingly put up with the peculiarities of the Madam, and the old-time inconveniences of the establishment. She was quick to notice the down dropping of the girlish face and the gleam of tears beneath the long lashes, and said, consolingly:

"Of course, Miss, it'll seem lonesome like and different at first. But you'll get used to it, you know. A body can get used to anything in time. I suppose Californy's

a terrible hot place, now ain't it? So it's a good job you've come away from it before the summer. That old man of yours, he's a queer stick, I judge. But polite, why he's real polite. And old. That's a fine thing, too. If he'd been young, Madam would have sent him about his business so fast 'twould have made him dizzy. But she likes everything old. Having old folks about her makes her forget her own age and fancy herself still a mere girl. Never remind my lady that she's not as young as she used to be and you'll get on—get on, fairly well, that is. Now, ready? Is that the kind of frock you generally wear?"

Barnes had comfortably rested in a rocker while Jessica washed and brushed at the great washstand, furnished with such expensive and badly nicked china, in one corner of the great chamber. The rocker had been overlooked, in the preparation of this room for a young girl's use, and would have been removed had Madam remembered it. She herself disdained the use of such a chair and considered it totally unfit for well-bred people. Easy chairs of ancient and ample proportions—these were quite different; but until of late, since that accident which Barnes had mentioned, she had herself never occupied aught but the straight-backed ones, such as had been the correct thing in her childhood.

"Yes, most of my clothes are made like this. My mother does them. Isn't it pretty? I've two more;" finished Jessica proudly, sweeping out the rather scant skirt to show its beauty.

"Two more! Is that all? And you one of the greatest heiresses in the land, my lady says!" cried Barnes,

looking with infinite scorn upon the simple blue flannel dress which its wearer thought so fine. "Well! If that ain't odd! Come. We'll go down now, and I warn you again—mind the stairs!"

CHAPTER V.

BUSTER TAKES A CITY TRAIL.

No life could have been in greater contrast to that of Sobrante than this upon which the young Californian now entered. Her own first letter home may best describe it, written soon after her arrival in Washington Square, and while her impressions were still vivid.

“MY DARLINGEST, DEAREST MOTHER:

We got here all safe and sound, after a nice journey. I was so homesick at first I thought I should die. Then Mr. Hale sent me to do something for a dear old Irish lady in the two sections ahead of ours. It was my section, too, afterwards when the sick mother and the Baby came. I found them in the tourist car—tourists can be real nice sometimes, mother dear—we’d made mistakes thinking they couldn’t be, there at home. But Mr. Hale says the world is full of all sorts of people and rude tourists and polite tourists are two of those sorts. Besides, our Cousin Margaret Dalrymple thinks it’s not being a tourist makes the difference. It’s ‘born in folks to be refined or coarse, and one can’t help nature.’ She thinks it’s ‘born in me,’ to be quite nice, but that’s no credit to me; she says I had the advantage to be a Waldron. Being a Waldron is, I guess, being everything ‘correct.’ I’m very glad we’re all Waldrons together, you and

Cousin Margaret, and darling Ned, and I. It seems to be a great help in doing just what one ought to do.

“Wasn’t it dear and sweet and just perfectly lovely of ‘Forty-niner’ to steal away and come to take care of me? Mr. Hale said he was afraid you Sobrante people would be worried about him, so he telegraphed right back to tell you where he was. I hope you got that message sooner than we used to those which came by way of Marion; but, of course, you did—since now we have a little station of our very own right at ‘the Sobrante.’ Queer. My Cousin Margaret and some people who have come to this house seem to think it’s a wonderful thing, that having a copper mine in the family. I don’t! I think it’s horrid. If it hadn’t been for that old stuff being dug out of the earth I’d never have had to come away here to be educated. Am I not getting educated fast? Yet I’ve learned to write thus much better just from you and Mr. Ninian teaching me at home. I am taking the greatest pains to do all you want me to.

“This is the queerest, quaintest old house in the city, some of the visitors say. That our Cousin Margaret has been offered an enormous price for it but won’t sell it, even though she would get all that money and ‘the neighborhood isn’t what it used to be.’ Even she says that, and complains most bitterly about the ‘parvenusers’ that have crept into it. There are stores and artists’ studios and apartment places and—all sorts of things that a Waldron doesn’t like in the Square, nowadays. But Cousin Margaret says that once only the ‘inner circle of society’ dwelt in these old houses.

“Speaking of old: that is one word you must never

apply to our Cousin Margaret. I thought I'd best tell you in case you didn't know. I shouldn't have known, not right at first, if Barnes hadn't told me. Barnes says that the older and more worn-out the things are the better pleased Mrs. Dalrymple is. She is so proud of everything in the 'mansion' being just the same as it was in her own grandfather's time, that she won't even buy new chairs for the kitchen nor have new plumbing put in, even though the health officers have been trying to make her do that. That's why she can never keep cooks and people like that, of the 'lower classes,' you know. Barnes says there have been four new cooks this very last week that ever was, and I guess each one is stupider than the other. I know Wun Lung would have been ashamed to put such stuff on our table at home as we had here that first luncheon. (We spell lunch with an 'eon' at our Cousin Margaret's.) As for dear Aunt Sally, I believe she would have got up and tossed the whole mess out into the garden for the chickens to eat. Only there aren't any chickens and Aunt Sally wasn't here.

"Dear Ephraim was; and that is the best thing has happened this dozen years, Tipkins says. You used to know Tipkins, so, of course, you know too that he 'wouldn't demean himself to cook anything' unless his Madam was really starving, and then he'd make Barnes do it. He is the only one can make Barnes do things she doesn't like. My Cousin Margaret can't. It's Barnes makes Cousin Margaret. But Barnes said she was a lady's-maid and she wouldn't demean, either. Ephraim thinks there's a 'touch of sentiment in Barnes's heart for Tipkins' and that's why she minds him

—*sometimes!* Ephraim wishes she would get the same sort of 'touch' for him, then she wouldn't order him to do things he really doesn't like. Mr. Hale thought Cousin Margaret would be angry with 'Fortyniner' for coming and send him away, but she wasn't at all. She thinks it is perfectly 'correct and Waldron-y' to have a man belonging to you. She was a little vexed that you didn't send a 'maid' with me, too, till I told her you hadn't any maid to send. Our maids were both Chinese 'boys' and had never combed a girl's hair in their lives nor buttoned a frock.

"But the best part about Ephraim is that now he is the cook. Seems that when he was offered that first luncheon he looked it over and turned up his nose about it. Said he reckoned he was in a city where they could buy victuals ready cooked if a body was such a fool he couldn't cook them himself. And would he go out and get something fit to eat? And Tipkins asked, had he any money? Then Ephraim had to own that he hadn't. It had taken his very last cent to pay his own fare here from home and to pay Buster's fare, too. Think of that? The darling old 'boy' had hired Buster brought on by express, in a car all by himself, because there weren't any cattle cars on our train, and it had cost—Oh! dear! I don't yet know how much. Ephy won't tell. Anyway, he'd struck his bottom dollar when he reached Washington Square—had just enough to hire the hackman to bring Buster to the house for him. So he's here, in the stable behind, with our Cousin Margaret's black span, who are as old, seems if, as everything else.

"Asking him if he had money for the food made

Ephraim mad. So he said that if he hadn't he had sense enough to cook it, if there was any to cook. Then Tipkins hurried off and bought a great basket full of everything nice, and that night we had such a dinner as would have done even Aunt Sally credit. There was quite a tilt between those two funny old men! Tipkins, he said *he* was the butler, and as long as there was a woman under the roof it wasn't a man's place to handle a grid-iron, and so he wouldn't demean to cook. Ephraim said *he'd* been everything under the sun a man could be—except a nasty, high-flown English butler! He'd worn the United States' military uniform, and he'd dug gold out of California mountains, and taught the nicest girl in the universe to sharpshoot to beat the militia—That was me! Wasn't it nice of him to say that?—and he guessed rather than let that girl what had done him so proud go and starve for want of decent food he'd tackle the first frying-pan came his way.

“So there he is, installed in the great, dreary kitchen downstairs, where it's so dark I wonder he can see at all, and just as proud now of the fine things he fixes as he used to be of me when I hit the bull's-eye. And our Cousin Margaret is perfectly delighted with him. She isn't a bit ashamed to say that her stomach has a good deal to do with her temper, and that if the first is satisfied the last is sure to be. That's a good thing about Cousin Margaret. She isn't a bit afraid to say anything she thinks about—about all that *is*, except her own age. I don't mean, course, that she would tell a wrong story about that, even, if anybody would dare to ask, but I can't fancy anybody daring. She is such a beautiful old

lady—gentlewoman, I should say. She's like you in that, she thinks that is the correctest word. She wears clothes that even I, who don't know much about such matters, know are perfectly beautiful. Shining, shimmering silks—like the sunlight on the arroyo when there's water in it; made long and draggy like our peacocks' own tails and her hair—Why, mother dearest! Even your beautiful hair isn't half so much as hers. It's piled on top of her head in what she calls a 'pompydoor,' and dips down behind all in little crinkles, like mine after it's been washed; and her skin is so white, I don't believe she ever went out into the sunshine without her veil to keep it off. Her eyes are black and snappy and she never wears glasses, like the 'boys' do, except in what Barnes calls the 'privacy of her bedchamber.' I've never seen that privacy and I should be afraid to sleep in her bedchamber. It's the front room up-stairs, with three great windows and an 'alcove.' In the 'alcove' is a big, big bed, all stuffy curtains and things around it and so high there's a little ladder to climb up. There are looking-glasses all about and so many chairs and wardrobes and things I shouldn't think she could hardly move about. I have seen it all from the hall, going to my own room at the back, but I've never been invited in and I wouldn't dare to go without being asked. That's the one thing about our Cousin Margaret. I guess it's what you call 'stately.' She keeps people from daring, all except Barnes. Even the persons who call and stay in the drawing-room act afraid of Madam. Her reception days are like a queen's, Tipkins says. There is to be one, to-morrow; the 'last of the season.' She sent

Barnes down somewhere to buy me a white frock, with blue ribbons and white shoes and stockings. I am to wear it at the reception and be presented, for a few minutes, because I am 'Gabriella's child.' Then I am to be sent away again. That seems silly to me: to spend money for a frock to wear only a few minutes, but I wouldn't dare say so to Madame Dalrymple.

"My room is the one you used to have. I wonder how you could sleep in it without being afraid. I can't. So Ephy comes upstairs and sleeps on a cot outside the door. I was never afraid in all my life before, but I am here. Everything is so big and dark and heavy. I feel as if I were carrying mountains on my chest, and I'd give—Oh! what wouldn't I give to jump on Buster's bare back and scamper up the canyon as fast as he could go! Cousin Margaret was nice about Buster, too. She says it is quite a distinction to have a real Californian with her *caballero* and broncho to ride alongside her carriage when she goes out driving in the Park. We are going this afternoon. But I don't feel as glad as I ought, because I must wear the funniest kind of a habit, with a long flapping skirt, and Ephraim must put on some stiff-looking things she calls suitable for a groom. Cousin Margaret has bought these clothes for us, too, all ready made, and Ephraim says he is plumb disgusted, and that he will feel like a fool. I hope he won't. I can't imagine darling 'Forty-niner' feeling like anybody except his own sensible self.

"Now, dearest mother, I must stop. I promised Cousin Margaret I would have my new riding things on at precisely four o'clock. When she says four o'clock

she doesn't mean a minute before that time nor a minute after. The first lesson she is trying to teach me is—is 'punctuerality' or something like that. She says that to be exact is another mark of a gentlewoman, and dear me! It seems that being a gentlewoman here in New York, with Madam to watch me, is lots harder than being one at dear Sobrante, with only your sweet smile to guide me.

"P.S. I have written you a long, long letter. I have felt as if I were talking to you and I have talked right out. The reason it is done so well is that Cousin Margaret has read it all over and corrected it and made me copy it. She said she would have liked to strike out some of my sentences; that they 'suggested a coarseness which must have come from the Trent side of my nature,' and that no girl, purely Waldron, would have put them in. However, it was her own dignity as a Waldron which kept her from the striking out. She was willing to correct the spelling and writing, though she left some mistakes for you to see, so that you might know how much I need that education I have got to take. Oh! dear! It sounds like a dose of castor oil, or Aunt Sally's picra! Or even like a great big club *I* must be cud-gelled with. Never mind. I'll 'tackle' that old education with everything that is in me, so that I can get it over and done with and travel home to you again. The last part of this letter I have not had to have corrected; and the next one I write I'll try to make so perfect she'll not wish to read any more. If our Cousin Margaret would only love me a little tiny bit! or let me love her. I so long to hear somebody say 'darling' or 'precious,' or

anything else that would make me know they cared. Only Ephraim does now and then, but has to say it on 'the sly' as he calls it. When Cousin Margaret doesn't hear. It would be beneath a Waldron's dignity to be familiar with a servant—and she considers darling 'Forty-niner' such. He only laughs about it; though, all the same, I believe he's met what Marty calls his 'come-uppance' in our Cousin Margaret. She likes him, treats him well enough, but keeps him at arms' length as if he were some sort of a 'creature' and he is more afraid of her than even Tipkins. He says that's because if he offended she would send him away and he won't be sent.

"Good-by, good-by, good-by! O my mother! If I had your arms about me just this minute! After all I have left a blank page. That is for you to fill up with kisses and love, love, love—to you, and Ned, and every single body on that dear Sobrante ranch. Oh! why did old Pedro ever show us that copper mine? If he hadn't I wouldn't have been one of 'the richest girls' nor have had an education! I should have just stayed happily at home and been only a loving

DAUGHTER JESSICA."

There was a tap at the door and the girl carefully folded and sealed the envelope, while a small colored girl, one of the various "emergencies" as Ephraim called the shifting "extra help" summoned almost daily, announced:

"The Madam she done want you-all to come right along downstairs and go a-ridin' wth her. She says

you-all must ha' heerd the big clock strike an' should ha' paid your own attention, miss."

Jessica sprang up, tripped in the skirt of her riding habit, and fell on the floor, while the messenger first stared then burst into a loud guffaw. That was a sort of noise not permitted in that old mansion and both she and Jessica were frightened as if they had committed some misdemeanor, as the latter got upon her feet again and held the offending skirt high out of the way.

She looked curiously upon the little maid, with whom she would far rather have stayed and played than to have ridden in solemn state beside the great carriage of her cousin. Girls were the greatest novelty of all these many new things which had come into her life; and the one redeeming feature about that forthcoming "education" was that it would be prosecuted in company with many other "girls." However, she dared not tarry, and in a few moments was in her saddle, with Ephraim riding a hired hack at the prescribed distance behind her, and Buster vainly trying to accommodate his paces to her will and those of the sedate blacks drawing the old barouche.

For a little time all went well. Jessica was an experienced mistress of this exercise and felt her spirits rise as they had not before since reaching the great city. Mrs. Dalrymple watched her with pride, which had at first been anxiety, but soon saw that she had no need to fear for any awkwardness on her young cousin's part.

"Why, my dear, you do well. You might have been trained in our best riding academy," commended the

Madam, with satisfaction. "It is the characteristic of a gentlewoman to be an accomplished equestrienne."

Jessica smiled and cast a meaning glance backward into Ephraim's face, which he was trying to compose into that impassive stolidity of Mrs. Dalrymple's own coachman and footman. But he failed and the most he could accomplish was an ignominious wink. Tipkins had duly instructed him as to the "correct" behavior on this his appearance as "groom," but that teacher would have been shocked through all his English soul had he seen that contorted wink.

Then they found their way into Fifth Avenue, and this seemed to Jessica the prettiest part of the town that she had seen, with its aristocratic, comparative quiet; and here Mrs. Dalrymple explained:

"That brown stone house on the corner, the right side of the street, is Madam Mearsom's school, where I shall place you at the beginning of the fall term. It is the most fashionable and exclusive of all our private schools and it is where your mother was trained. I shall take you to call upon her soon, and have already entered your name upon her list. Commonly, a pupil has to be enrolled at least two years before there is a vacancy in her limited classes; but Madam has made an exception in your favor because, as she admitted, she has always had the honor of educating the Waldrons. I hope you will appreciate the concession and never forget the high ideals you must maintain."

"I will try, Cousin Margaret," dutifully replied "little Captain," though feeling that the "Waldrons and their ideals" were a burden too heavy for her to bear.

“Now we must turn aside, into a cross street, to see my dressmaker. I don’t know why such persons always *will* live on cross streets! It’s most annoying, they are so much narrower and confusing. Notice, child, how our New York is laid out. As simple as a checker-board—from First Street up, all the cross streets go by count, and all the Avenues in the same order, until you come to that far-away East Side where they are lettered. But neither you nor I will ever have more to do with Avenues A, B, or C, than to know they do exist and are marked on the city map.”

The coachman drew up before a house which seemed to be familiar both to him and the blacks, which settled down into a sleepy attitude, quite unfitting such aristocratic beasts but that indicated their prescience of a long wait. The Madam was helped from the carriage and had to pause a moment, as always when she made any physical exertion, before ascending the steps. Then she passed up them with the ease of a much younger woman and was promptly admitted.

It was there that disaster fell. Buster had been growing more and more restive. Jessica’s unfamiliar skirt fretted his delicate skin; the saddle was not his old one fitting comfortably to his back; this enforced pacing, pacing, was intolerable to a broncho of spirit; this standing quiet was more annoying even than the pacing had been; and when a honking automobile came dashing around the corner of the block, almost into his very face, he cast one terrified, reproachful glance into his rider’s eyes and took the bit in his teeth.

Oh! but he traveled then! Ephraim pursuing and

using most objectionable language to the hack he bestrode.

"Oh! you vile beast! Call yourself a horse, do you? well, you don't know what a horse is, I tell you! Get up! Get on! *Vamos!* Speed! Even old Stiffleg, that deserted me on the streets of Los Angeles, had more fire in him than you, poor old wornout New Yorker! *Vamos! V-A-M-O-S!*"

In vain. Jessica had vanished. The broncho, unused to city sights and sounds, would not be checked nor swerved from the mad course he had elected to follow. The most she could do was to keep her seat upon his back and this she managed, even though hampered by that detestable skirt and that slippery new saddle. Bare-backed, without this handicap, how she would have reveled in that mad ride! even now, knowing that her Cousin Margaret's dire displeasure awaited her return, she did revel in it. Almost she could fancy herself tearing across the plain, where no obstruction offered and the soft sod was a cushioned pathway for Buster's hoofs, and for a moment closing her eyes, she let her fancy carry her back to Paraiso d'Oro; and Buster—whither he would.

But she opened them again in terror, as a wild scream came from beneath those hoofs and the broncho was so suddenly checked that he almost threw her off backward.

The inevitable had happened on that crowded thoroughfare into which he had now turned. She and he had been ignorantly reckless of consequences and most untoward consequences had resulted.

CHAPTER VI.

JESSICA'S FIRST GIRL FRIEND.

THE screams came from a girl of Jessica's own age, whom Buster had ridden down and thrown to the pavement. But they were instantly taken up and repeated by a score of throats, while a crowd assembled on the spot, as if it had risen from the ground itself.

"Oh! have I killed her?" cried "Little Captain," as swiftly realizing the accident, and almost as swiftly leaping from her saddle to bend above the girl who now lay with closed eyes and white face, apparently unconscious.

"Now, that's awful!" cried somebody. "It's against the law for folks to ride that gait!"

"Arrest her, officer! Don't let her get away!" advised another on-looker, as a policeman laid his hand on the broncho's bridle and held the creature still, save for an exciting trembling through all its frame.

"I'm not going to 'get away'! I want to take care of this poor girl!" retorted Jessica, lifting her head and discovering the officer. "O sir! I am so sorry. We didn't see her, Buster nor I, and what can I do? Is there a hospital near? Is she—Do you think—she *can't* be dead, all in a little minute like that! Tell me, help me—help her—Please, please!"

At the mention of hospital the girl still lying on the pavement opened her eyes and tried to rise, and willing

hands helped her to do so. She did gain her feet, quivering and terrified still, yet managing to protest with vigor:

"No, no, no! I won't go! Not to a hospital—I won't, I won't! See? I ain't hurted. I can walk—I shan't—I shan't!"

In truth she was not really injured save by the shock of falling, which had rendered her senseless for a little; until that word "hospital"—so dreaded by the very poor—pierced her consciousness. Buster had run against and knocked her down, but it was the blow upon the stones which had done the most mischief.

With tears of pity and regret dimming her own blue eyes, Jessica slipped a sustaining arm around the other's waist and eagerly assured her:

"Nor shall you go if you're not really hurt. You shall go home, right home, if you'll tell me where and this policeman will get a carriage for us."

The Californian was making prompt use of the knowledge she had already gained concerning this strange city. Policemen were the proper persons to direct, in time of trouble, and carriages might be had at any and all times and everywhere. Street cars were confusingly abundant but of these she knew nothing and was afraid.

It was the officer who recalled her to the fact that hiring carriages costs money, and:

"Can you pay for it, miss? Your name and address, please. Whoa, there, you brute! Was there nobody with you? Don't you know better than to ride like that, right here in the city?"

"No, I didn't. My name is Jessica Trent. I'm just from California and I don't know much about New York.

My cousin, Mrs. Dalrymple, lives at Number — Washington Square, and I live with her. She has money, and will pay the carriage man. I haven't any—not here. But I wasn't alone, only that old hired horse wouldn't travel and—Ah! here he comes! Ephraim, Ephraim!”

Though he had failed to keep her in sight, the despised hack-horse had had intelligence enough to follow the course his late companion, Buster, had taken, and now brought “Forty-niner” to his “Captain’s” side.

“Why, Lady Jess! Whatever’s this?” demanded the astonished ranchman, beholding his beloved child standing in the middle of the street, with her arm about the waist of a ragged, hunchbacked girl, and a tray full of flowers lying on the stones before them. The flowers were sadly trampled and bruised, and Buster had planted one restless hoof plump through the wicker tray.

“I—We run over, or knocked her down, this dear, poor little flower-girl, I guess she is. I want to get a carriage and take her home. Have you got any money? This policeman says I must have it first.”

Ephraim slowly dismounted and slipping his own horse’s bridle over one arm, coolly relieved the officer of Buster’s, much to the delight of that person in uniform. Then he demanded:

“What’s the taxes?”

“The—what?” asked the policeman, in turn.

“The taxes, the cost, the price of that there carriage?”

“Probably a dollar or two. Depends on where the girl lives and how long it takes. Say, Sis, I’ve seen you around here before. You’ve been careless more’n once and a cripple like you’d better take no chances.”

For reply the flower-seller made a saucy face and stooped to gather up her scattered posies, critically calculating the damage done to them and the consequent loss to her. She had recovered from her brief unconsciousness and as Jessica also began to collect the daffodils and tulips, exclaiming with delight over their beauty, her business instinct came to the fore.

“Five cents a bunch, miss. Only five cents!”

Yet it was almost mechanically she spoke, for all her hearing was strained to learn the outcome of that carriage-discussion; and regardless of further injury to her blossoms, she clapped her thin hands in delight, as Ephraim settled it by saying:

“Call it up, officer! I reckon we can stand that much. No, you needn’t worry about the broncho. I’ll lead him and follow the carriage. But you’ll have to give the orders—This old New York of yours sets a plainsman plumb crazy!”

The officer found no cause for delay. He had made a few entries in his note book. The hunchback was not injured, she didn’t need a carriage, but if these wild Westerners fancied that she did and were able to pay for it, that was their business.

When the summoned hack drew up to the curbstone, whither the two girls had retreated when the crowd dispersed, the flower-seller’s pale face really glowed almost as pink as Jessica’s own, and her ill-shod feet danced on the stones, as she cried:

“Oh! it’s true, it’s true! What’ll they say when they see me? Oh! my soul and body! Oh! my!”

“You’ll have to tell where you live,” said Jessica, fol-

lowing the other into the vehicle and smiling at her eagerness.

"Course. I know how. This is the way they do it, I've seen 'em, lots of times, waiting outside the theaters and such. The ladies they steps in, just like I did, and they speaks up at the coachy and they says: 'Home'! Or maybe, 'Waldorf 'Storia,' or 'Fifth Avenoo,' or wherever 'tis. Hark. Hear me! Driver, 221 Avenoo A. Back tenement, top floor.'"

It might have been that palatial Waldorf Astoria, to which she had referred, rather than one of the dingiest abodes on that street which was named by a letter, and that Madam Dalrymple had said was too humble for any Waldron to know about. Yet here was Jessica going to it, must go, or be guilty of a rudeness less "Waldrony" than even that knowledge of poor Avenue A; and it never entered her mind that she could send the hunchback home, unattended. Though, indeed, it is doubtful if she could, for the hackman would not, in that case, have felt at all sure of his fare.

Fortunately, Ephraim knew little and cared less for any street distinctions. He was simply and wholly disgusted by this whole outing. The horse he bestrode was never meant for a saddle; his groom's livery was uncomfortable in the matter of fit—as well as pride; the restless Buster was extremely difficult to lead, where peril of the streets was constantly menacing, and only love for "Little Captain" prevented his turning about and making straight for Washington Square, even though he had to ask directions thither at every block.

"My name's Sophy Nestor. What's yours? Ain't

this jolly? I'm the gladdest ever was 't that horse of yours knocked me down. My! But didn't the cop want to hurry me off to the hospital! No, 'twasn't him, though, 'twas your own plaguy self! Do you know what a hospital is? It's a place where they take folks to cut off their legs and things. We poor folks is what keeps the hospitals goin'. Them doctors they catch us and cut us just to learn how the rich folkses' insides are made. 'Cause that way, Granny says, we're just as good as the rich ones, our insides are. But, maybe, you didn't know. Else, you'd never ha' said it. What 'd you say it was? Oh! I'm so happy! I never, never was so happy in my life! Won't the children in our court and all along the block just stare their eyes out when they see me come ridin' home in a reg'lar carriage! I never thought I'd be inside one, never in all my life. What 'd you say it was?"

"I hadn't said, but it's Jessica Trent. And is it possible that right here in this city full of all sorts of wagons that you've never ridden before?"

The carriage had now passed eastward through the city and even to the Westerner's untrained sight the streets looked more crowded, the buildings poorer and dingier, and the passing throngs altogether different from those upon Fifth Avenue. But she observed less of the surroundings than of this chattering girl beside her. So misshapen, so wretchedly clothed, and so radiantly happy! She had longed for a playmate of her own age but she had not dreamed of one like this.

In a few moments they had exchanged the fullest confidences. Sophy had listened wide-eyed and, at first, un-

believing, to Jessica's story of a home where one couldn't even see another house, because it was so far away; but she had gradually accepted the fact and was lost in admiration of a girl who could live such a wonderful life yet be so friendly and nice to a mere flower-girl from "Aveny A."

When they reached that dilapidated block where Sophy lived, and with a great air that young person had ordered the driver to stop, she turned to Jessica and said:

"Now we'll get out. Oh! my soul and body! It's all clean over and done with! *It didn't last.* Seems if it didn't last a minute. Say, Jessica, if I should go back to that place some other day would you ride round and let your horse knock me down again, so's I could come home in another carriage? Would you?"

"No, I would not! But—but if you care so much about it and will put on a whole frock and come to Washington Square I'll ask my Cousin Margaret Dalrymple to take you with us in hers. But I guess I won't get out. I—I'd rather not. She might not like it;" answered Jessie, more in answer to a warning nod from Ephraim who had now come up to them than from any reluctance of her own. It was, truly, a strange and most unlovely place. Lines of ragged clothing fluttered from every floor, children rolled in the gutters and fought each other savagely at the least provocation, street vendors yelled till the air was full of discord, and the whole surroundings told of that abject poverty which Jessica now beheld for the first time. Yet it interested her wonderfully, more because it was new than because she understood it. So, when Sophy insisted, she disregarded

Ephraim's warning and sprang to the sidewalk, smiling in spite of herself at the hunchback's uptossed head and the remarkable strut she assumed for the benefit of on-lookers.

"Yes, you *must*, Jessica Trent. Else Granny won't believe it's true and 'll nag me 'cause the basket's broke. I'll come to Washington Square all right, but I can't—I can't put on a whole frock. I haven't got one. This way, right this."

Seizing Jessica's hand so forcibly she could not withdraw it, Sophy hurriedly led the way through a sort of dark, damp alley, running between two houses, to another tall tenement facing a court in the rear. Here there were more clothes-lines, more fluttering garments, more crying babies, and more outrageous odors. Instinctively, the stranger pinched her nose to protect it against the stench, while Sophy consolingly remarked:

"The smell ain't nothing when you get used to it. Granny used to mind it awful, when we first moved here from over Brooklyn way. That was 'fore I can remember an' my father was killed. She don't now. She don't mind anything only having to *live*. She's dreadful tired of that, Granny is, 'cause she don't much like the folks in the houses. I like 'em all right. Mind the steps! That third one isn't there, and there's a hole in all of 'em. I've got so used I know just where to step, even in the dark. Now, one more and we'll be to Granny's door. How funny you breathe!"

"I can't—I can't hardly breathe at all! It's so—so awful high—and—smelly."

"Pinch it again. 'Tisn't so bad in Granny's room.

She keeps the winder open all the time. Say, Granny, Granny Briggs! Here's Jessica Trent, away from California, wherever that is, and her horse she was a ridin' on Thirty-fourth Street knocked me silly and broke the basket, and she brung me home in a carriage, *in a carriage*, Granny Briggs! And you needn't say she didn't, 'cause you can go right down into the Aveny and see it standin' on the stones a-waitin' to take her back again to where she come from. True's I live. You can see her for yourself!"

Jessica made her best, most "Waldron-y" courtesy, and with a grace hardly to have been looked for in such a place, the aged mistress of the one room returned it. She was a comely old body, rather ragged than untidy, and she wore a broad frilled cap on her head, and a piece of a frayed shawl pinned about her shoulders. She had a great pile of men's overalls before her, to which she was putting the finishing stitches, "by hand," the only sort of sewing she could get to do, and for which she was paid a miserable price. But it, and Sophy's flower-selling, was their only source of income, and she could afford to waste no time, even to talk with this astonishing young visitor who had come.

So she rose once, bobbed a returning courtesy to Jessica's profound one, and settled back in her chair, having scarcely paused at all in her work. Then, still sewing as if her life depended on her speed—as indeed it did—she listened in silence to the story Sophy told, only opening her lips once to remark:

"Pity the pony didn't finish you up while it was about it, my poor child. Life isn't worth living for such as you.

Or me either," she added gloomily, and wondering why the Californian didn't depart. She wished she would. Sophy would have to carry home part of these garments before the shop closed for the night and poor folks had no time for idling. She expressed her desire rather promptly:

"Well, if you've done talking, get the leather piece and wrap this work up. If you hurry you'll get there in time and since you've wasted all them flowers you'd better step lively. There's just one half loaf in this cupboard and you're amazing hungry—for such as you."

"Yes'm. You help, Jessie, please;" cried Sophy; and then, as if inspired by some wonderful idea, raised herself from the floor where she was spreading the piece of carriage-cloth used to enwrap the heavy overalls on their journeys to and from "the shop," and exclaimed: "Oh! let's do it! Let's ask that nice driver to carry us 'round by the factory on our way to Washington Square and carry the bundle with us. Won't that be grand?"

Jessica hesitated. She feared she was already doing something her guardian would disapprove, yet otherwise felt no sense of guilt. But instantly her hesitation vanished, remembering that she had forewarned Mrs. Dalrymple that there might be times when she could not be obedient, when her own sense of what was right—for herself—interfered with Madam's judgment. This was one of the times! She was sure of it.

Ephraim had nearly "lost his head" in his anxiety, tied to his waiting outside with the two horses which he could neither leave nor lose; and his patience entirely gave way when the two girls reappeared, tugging a

mighty bundle between them, Jessica tripping in her unfamiliar skirt, but Sophy radiant in her rags and in the prospect of another ride.

What the driver felt was best expressed by the fierce glance he shot the sharpshooter, with whom he had had a most enjoyable talk during their long wait, and by his words:

"I look to you, sir, for payment for all this nonsense!"

The effect of this was to turn Ephraim's wrath from his "Little Captain" upon the city jehu, and to make him retort, savagely:

"Plague take your cautious soul! You shall be paid and double paid and don't you forget it."

An hour later there entered the aristocratic but now most anxious presence of Madam Dalrymple, two brightly smiling girls, chattering in the friendliest manner, and one of them explaining:

"I'm sorry, Cousin Margaret, that Buster ran away, and yet I'm not sorry only for fear you didn't like it. This is Sophy Nestor and she lives on Avenue A. I've been to see where she lives, after Buster knocked her down, and now she's come to see us, and I'm going up to get one of my frocks to give her, 'cause she hasn't any whole one. And please, will you give me five dollars to pay the hackman? And for fifty cents more he'd carry her back again."

This explanation was received in ominous silence.

CHAPTER VII.

EPHRAIM TAKES HOME THE BUNDLE.

THE silence was broken by Madam Dalrymple's dispatching Tipkins to pay the waiting hackman. But the additional fifty cents was not forthcoming. In its stead a dime was given Sophy and she was, also, dispatched with a crispness that forbade her accompanying Jessica upstairs, in search of a new frock, and that sent "her about her business" with the reminder that she was to trouble that house no more.

"I will have the matter of the accident investigated and proper restitution made. You can give Tipkins your address, Sophy Nestor, and need not wait for Jessica to come downstairs. Tipkins, show the small person out."

Sophy stared but did not disobey, even though her soul longed for one more glimpse of the lovely girl who had crossed her pathway, for a moment, so to speak, and had vanished within the gloom of that forbidding mansion. She was an impudent street child, in ordinary, ready to "sass" anybody who interfered with her and all the more "touchy" because of her deformity and the curiosity it aroused. But she dared not sauce this wonderful old lady, who looked to her like some of the fash-

ionably draped wax figures in modistes' windows and whose voice was so icily quiet and stern.

She followed Tipkins' wake with a meekness hitherto unknown, but a meekness that was external only.

"Huh! She owns the inside of this house, she does, but she don't own the whole street, so there. And I'll take my stand right out here in the Square, and here I'll sell my flowers—or bust! Then I'll see Jessica and if she can't give it to me to-day, she'll give me that frock some other day. I hope it won't be like that riding one she had on, all tight and draggley, but—Goody! Them ten centses 'll buy a real lot of daffies offen the market folks, when market's done, to-morrow. I won't ride in no street car, I won't, but I'll be right here in this Square early to-morrow morning, and Jessie and me can talk through that iron fence, same's if we was close together. Them lions is only iron, too, and I'm not a bit scared of 'em."

These reflections passed through the hunchback's mind as she received the dime from Tipkins and had the door of the mansion closed in her face. Then she seated herself on a bench in the park till she remembered that in leaving the hack she had left the bundle of fresh work in it, which she was taking home to Granny. At that memory she sprang up dismayed and hurried homeward, fearing many things but most of all that she would have to go without food for many meals to come because of her forgetfulness. Granny wouldn't punish her. She rarely did by word or blow; but Sophy's worst punishment would be the fact that the bundle of goods was lost and that Granny would have to make it good. Poor Granny!

So old and so discouraged! Yet so much nicer in every way, the loyal grandchild thought, than that rich old lady in the mansion she had left.

"Why, Cousin Margaret! Where has Sophy gone?" asked Jessica, hurrying back to the room where she had left her visitor, with her own prettiest frock on her arm; even that beloved one of white with scarlet trimmings which had been made for the happy *Navidad*.

"To where she belongs, I hope. Child, you must never, never do such a thing again."

"But, Cousin Margaret, I didn't do it. It was Buster, poor fellow, who was scared almost to death by those upstairs trains and the automobiles. Why, they scare me, too, they sound so like a flock of wild geese coming right down on your head. I hate them. I don't see why people ride in them when there are so many horses."

"For once I agree with you. I also detest them, the modern, disagreeable things. But that's begging the question. I refer to your disobedience in visiting that tenement house."

"Why—But, Cousin Margaret! I didn't know—you hadn't really forbidden; you'd only said I needn't ever know anything about poor Avenue A and the folks live on it, and I wouldn't have known only Buster made me. My mother says nothing happens by accident and that everything leads to something else. Like this, seems if: If Buster hadn't thrown poor Sophy down, I'd never have know how poor she was and had the chance to be good to her. I'm going to write my mother soon as I can and tell her; and that's the first time I ever was glad I was going to be an 'heiress.' Heiresses have lots of

money and oh! dear! It will take all we can ever dig out of that copper mine to take care of all the poor folks in Avenue A. I shall ask my mother to have you, or Mr. Hale, or whoever 'tis that keeps the money, to give me some right away. I can't bear to think of any nice old lady, like Granny Briggs, living in a tiny room with only a bed and two chairs and a weeny, tiny stove in the corner. She was so busy she couldn't even stop to talk to me a minute. It made me feel real tired just to look at her. I'm going to spend my whole life helping poor Avenue A people, or others like them, and I'm going to begin with Sophy and her grandmother. I just can't forget them, nor—nor the *poor smell!* I should hate that worse of all, that poor smell. Wouldn't you?"

Mrs. Dalrymple had listened in silence while her small relative thus unburdened her soul, and now replied with considerable satisfaction:

"That's the Waldron in you. I have tried, and once Gabriella did, faithfully, to do what is known as 'slumming;' but the 'poor smell' conquered us both. I trust it will you, and certainly you have made a good beginning, to detect it so instantly. Now, sit down and listen to me. You are *going* to be a rich young woman but you *are* not yet. You are but a very inexperienced child, who has just caught her first glimpse of the 'seamy side' of life. It isn't a pleasant side, and to you it isn't a necessary one. There are numberless organized charities to provide for the wants of the poor and I subscribe to many of them. I will have your name put down upon one or two lists and it must then content you to know that you are helping, through others, those who need.

Personally, you can have nothing to do with the abjectly poor. It isn't fitting and it cannot be. So the next time you are tempted to visit any such tenement as that of to-day please to remember that you are under my authority and I forbid.

"Now, that is a longer lecture than I often give and I shall not repeat it. You must remember and obey. Now go, ask Barnes to make a hot bath ready for you and send everything you have on to the laundry. Except your habit, which, of course, must go to a professional cleaner. I feel as if you had brought that 'poor smell' into this very house!"

"Oh! no, Cousin Margaret, it isn't that. It's just the ordinary smell-y kind of air is in here. I noticed it the moment I got here and Barnes never opens the windows like she ought. My mother says that the more outdoor air we get into the house the sweeter it is. Why, Cousin Margaret, we never close the windows at Sobrante, except in the rainy season and even then not many of them.

"And I'm sorry not to go right away as you want, but there's something been forgot. We left the bundle of sewing in that carriage and I promised Sophy this frock. I couldn't break my word, you know, so I will have to go just the once more and after I find the carriage. Is it in the street here, still?"

"Oh! you tiresome girl! What next? I did not for a moment suppose that in inviting you to my house I was going to have its peace so disturbed. Here have I been fretting away half the afternoon, about your disappearance, instead of enjoying my drive in the park as I

should. Then when you do come home you do it bringing some probable infection with you. Those tenements are never free from some contagious disease, I've read, and I expect you'll come down with scarlet fever, or diphtheria, or some other terrible thing. That would mean a health officer visiting and fumigation and other miserable annoyances.

"But, no. The hack has disappeared, the bundle of sewing with it—if such there was. But you'll not go seek it. I will send Ephraim and with sufficient money in hand to pay for all possible injuries. Now, call him and let's have done with this unpleasant Nestor-Briggs affair."

Jessica obeyed, uttering no further protest. Indeed, if dear old "Forty-niner" were to take the matter in hand it would be promptly and well done. Fortunately, too, it happened that scenting a possible future customer, the hackman had early in their time of waiting given Mr. Marsh his carriage number and the address at which he might usually be found. Thither Ephraim departed, and shouldering the bundle himself, reappeared at 221 Avenue A, just as the old lady and her grandchild were sitting down to eat that last half-loaf, with gloomy faces and all too vigorous appetites.

When Ephraim tapped at the rickety door and Sophy opened it, to see him standing there with the lost bundle of blue denim on his shoulders, she screamed with delight and, catching his hand, dragged him within.

"Why, why hold on, there, Sissy! I just come to fetch this back, that was forgot, and to say in the name of Madam Dalrymple, my 'Little Captain's' present

guardeen, as how she'd be glad to make good for that accident of Buster's and the succeeding troubles, and to fetch this here little dress of Miss Jessica's that she promised Sissy, yonder. Mrs. Trent made it with her own hands and my 'Captain' wore it a Christmas Day."

With considerable reluctance, Ephraim was unrolling the little parcel and displaying the charming contents. As he did so he could not refrain from one glance at poor Sophy's misshapen back and his wonderment as to the garment's fit. It actually grieved him to think of anything the beloved mistress of Sobrante had handled being bestowed in this dingy abode where even he could detect and shudder at the "poor smell."

Nor was he at all prepared for the ready hospitality of the old grandmother, who, while her grandchild was rapturously fondling and examining the gift, all unconscious of the disparaging look the sharpshooter had given her, quietly pushed Sophy's chair back to the bare table and said:

"We're just eating our suppers, Mr.—"

"Marsh, ma'am, Ephraim Marsh, once of Californy, late of New York, and originally hailing from Concord, in the good old State of New Hampshire."

He pronounced it "Cawnco'd," and he gave to his r's the peculiar pronunciation which appealed to Granny Briggs's old heart as his offer of money had not done.

"*Marsh? Of Concord?* Why, bless you, man, I was born there! I myself!"

"You don't! well, gosh all hemlocks! If I ain't gladder'n I would be to be struck by lightning and pretty

much on the same order of things. A girl from Cawnco'd! Shake. Name, please, as it is and as it was."

"Briggs now, Badger it was. My father was the village shoemaker and cobbler when the town was young and small," cried the thin old lady, her voice vibrant with unexpected delight, and so joyously altered in appearance that Sophy ceased staring at her new frock and stared at her grandmother instead.

"Well, well, well! I haven't a word to say; except that it's just as my good mistress, Gabriella Trent says, *the Lord does lead*. To think of it! Just to think of the strangeness of it for one single minute! Your father was the shoemaker that my father, the tanner, sold his skins to! Well-tanned hides they were, too, *same as my own!* Tanned so well and so often that I got a little tired of the business and lit out 'fore I was more'n half grown. Sophia Badger! Well, then, I reckon I *will* stay and take a bite with you, just for the sake of old times; only, I guess, by the look of things you haven't been used to men-folk's appetites, lately. I saw a real decent-looking grocery store as I came by. I'll step down and pick up a few odds and ends, if you'll let me. I've been doing the cooking myself, lately, for the oddest family I ever struck and 'twould be an agreeable change to eat somebody else's truck for once. More'n that, there never was a New Hampshire woman that couldn't cook to beat the world. How's a rasher of bacon with eggs, potato chips, and a prime cup of coffee? If I fetch 'em will you cook them, Sophy Badger?"

"Will I not?" cried the now happy old woman, no

whit ashamed to take charity from such as hailed from Concord"—magic word! In a moment "Forty-niner" had disappeared, the bundle of work had been recklessly tossed into a corner, the oil-stove had been lighted, Sophy dispatched to a neighbor's to borrow some needed dishes and frying pans, and the whole atmosphere changed to that of a sunny room in a well furnished home. Even the "poor smell" vanished when the sizzling bacon sent up its own appetizing odors and Granny set the window wide to let in the evening air. With that sunset breeze came, also, something which these two had long needed and sadly; and that was—happiness.

Blessed Buster! Whose careless speed had brought it all about! Such a supper as that Sophy Nestor could not remember. There was neither stint nor caution about it, and though her elders' soon satisfied their own appetites, finding in their reminiscences a more delightful mental food, the girl ate on and on, and when she could do no more was not even bidden to take care of what was left against the morrow's breakfast.

But at last the feast was over. "Forty-niner" resolutely rose and tore himself away. He had remembered with compunction that not only the older people in Washington Square would also need their supper but that Jessica would, too. So even this old friendship could not interfere with his love for his "Little Captain" whose history he had given, with all the tender embellishments his fond fancy pictured. Till even the world-soured old Granny began to think the girl whom Sophy had called an "angel" must be such, in truth; and left alone with her grandchild, clasping the twenty-five good dollars

which Madam had sent, with the offer of more if this should not be satisfactory, the poor soul burst into tears and expressions of affection. This almost frightened Sophy, to whom such demonstrations were new, and she was glad when she was bidden:

“Go to bed now, child, and dream of the good luck has come to us this day! And to-morrow I’ll write my duty on a decent sheet of paper and you shall carry it to that old Madam with a nice bunch of daffies—not too stale nor faded. Go to bed, but—you may kiss me first.”

Back hurried Ephraim to that so different home in Washington Square; and for once regardless of the etiquette he now so faithfully tried to practice burst into Madam Dalrymple’s presence, exclaiming:

“That does beat all my first wife’s relations, as Aunt Sally Benton would say. That little hunchback’s grandmother is no real pauper as we thought. She’s just a bit down on her luck and as nice as lives. Why, woman alive, *she hails from Cawwco’d!* Think of that! We were both little tackers together in that blessed old town and my father used to sell her father shoe leather! Hooray, ‘Little Captain!’ That was a lucky strike Buster made, when he hit Sophy Nestor!”

Even Jessica looked up disturbed at this unwonted behavior on her “man’s” part, knowing full well how greatly Cousin Margaret would disapprove, but the expression of that great dame’s countenance was worth a study.

After a moment of amused silence, said she:

“Indeed! How remarkable! But, Ephraim, if you please, spare us any more rhapsodies on the Avenue A

residents. Jessica was bad enough but—Ephraim, I would like my dinner.”

Instantly, the old man saluted, wheeled with his accustomed military precision and vanished below stairs. But he felt as if he had been dashed with icy water, while Jessica in sympathy found tears spring to her eyes. But, Jessie, alas! did not as yet realize her full privilege in being a Waldron.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORNING TALKS AND INTERRUPTIONS.

"COUSIN MARGARET, are there many Avenue A's in this city?" asked Jessica one morning, shortly after that first glimpse of real poverty which her visit to Sophy Nestor had given her.

Madam laid down the Review she was reading—a Review of Paris fashions—and brought her attention to bear upon the girl sitting thoughtfully upon that old, fascinating carpet, whose half-invisible figures she was so fond of studying.

"I hope not! I should say that one was amply sufficient for even so large a city as New York. But, Jessica, do get up and take a chair. You are rumpling your frock and I shall want you to go down town with me very soon. I have already ordered the carriage. You will need many more things and so shall I. Look, child. You have fairly good taste. What do you think of this design for a dinner gown? It strikes me as very graceful, with the long lines and its dignified simplicity. I've a mind to order Melanie to make me one just like it."

Jessica obediently came and stood beside the lady, and tried to fix her gaze upon the colored page of models. But they seemed to dance before her in a maze of ragged garments fluttering from a "pulley" clothes-line, and

the simpering faces of the pictured wearers took on the haggard features of the wretched tenement women she could not forget.

"They all look so silly, those paper women, Cousin Margaret."

"Of course, odd child! The editor could scarcely afford to pay real artists to put on the heads to his fashion-models after the great expense of them, alone. This is the most exclusive of our magazines, devoted to the art of dress, and the styles in this are copyrighted. That's such a fine thing about them, they can never become common. But—why do you look at me so strangely?"

"Did I, Cousin Margaret? Beg pardon, if I was rude. I didn't mean it. I was just—just thinking about that buying me more clothes. Why must I have them? Do you think my mother would like it?"

"Quite likely not. She seems to have taken up very peculiar ideas, out there in that wilderness. But you happen to be living in civilization now and must be clothed in accordance with its demands."

Jessica laughed. It always amused her to hear dear Sobrante spoken of as "that wilderness," when her own memory of it was so delightful. And it was a little strange, had either of these two thought about it, that so old a person as Madam should fall into the habit of consulting so young an one as "Little Captain." But the lady had lived so long alone with servants only that it was a relief to discuss affairs with a real "gentlewoman" and a Waldron, even a girlish one. She had already learned to look into Jessica's eyes, as into a mirror, for approval or disapproval of her oft-changed attire; and,

when it was what her own conscience warned her was "too youthful," to meet a disappointed expression in the big, blue eyes. They were so clear and far-seeing, with such instant perception of the false or the true, that Cousin Margaret trusted them in spite of herself.

"Well, girlie, what do you think? Would I look well in such a gown?" again rather impatiently demanded the Madam.

"I think you would look beautiful, just beautiful. You always do, dear Cousin. Next to my mother I think you must be the most handsome lady lives. I've seen nobody here in this New York, in the carriages we meet in the Park, nor in the stores down town—or up town, either—that can compare with you. I suppose that's because you are a Waldron. And so—Do you mind if I say it right out?"

"Whether I do or not you are pretty sure to 'say out' whatever is in your mind. So do it now," smilingly answered the other, flattered more than she acknowledged by this sincere admiration of Jessica.

"Well, then, I wish you wouldn't spend any more money on pretty clothes. I wish you'd give it to the Avenue A people, and all the others like them in this great city. O Cousin Margaret! It just makes my heart ache so I can't sleep, some nights, thinking they have no soft beds like ours to lie on and so few poor rags to wear while you, while I, have more things than we need. My mother thought three frocks were all I wanted. Two to change and a fresh one for Sunday. Only, of course, at Christmas time it is well to have a prettier one because that is the best day in all the year and one should

do it reverence. It would save you so much worry, too, and you wouldn't get half so tired."

"Humph! Who ever said that I was tired? Not I, indeed, and who spoke of worry? Oh! that unfortunate accident of Buster's! I'd rather have given a thousand dollars than have it happen. Your head has been full of maggots—I mean of unwholesomely grave ideas—ever since. I think that Ephraim fosters them, too, and much as I should dislike to separate you two I fear I shall have to do it, unless you both promise to put this Avenue A business out of mind and take life as you should, in your own station. Tired? I'm certain you never heard me complain, little Jessica Trent, nor anybody else."

"No, Cousin Margaret, and that's what makes Barnes and me feel so bad."

"Heigho! So Barnes is in it, too, is she?"

"Yes, of course. It's she helps undress you and puts away your clothes and she says the wardrobes and closets are just packed with them. She says it's a great worryment to her to keep the moths and bugs out of 'em. She says it would be worse, only you like silk things best and moths don't much trouble the silks. She——"

"My dear, let me explain what mostly 'worries' our good soul Barnes. As lady's-maid her perquisites are my cast-off clothing. This she sells for a considerable sum and puts the proceeds in the bank. So I shouldn't think she would object to my buying as many new things as possible. Humph! If Barnes has got to betraying bedroom secrets Barnes must be dealt with."

Madam Dalrymple leaned back in her chair, tossed

the Review aside, and tapped with her tiny cane upon the floor. This cane she called her "affectation," laughingly declaring that she carried it because it happened to be a fad of fashionable folk just then, and only the old maid servant knew how sorely it was really needed for support. At that very moment, indeed, it was almost impossible for the proud woman to prevent the contortion of her handsome features by a spasm of pain. Rheumatism held her in thrall, but still she laughed and defied it; believing that no Waldron should be overcome by anything so plebeian as physical distress. She would carry herself proudly to the end and when that came, let it come quickly!

Barnes appeared and was bidden to bring hat and mantle; and in a few moments more the Dalrymple carriage was whirling storeward, its mistress and her young western cousin making such a lovely picture against its dark cushions that more than one person looked and envied. Not the least of these a small flower-girl, clad in a rather soiled white-and-scarlet frock, who hid her misshapen shoulders against a building and wistfully held up her violets for sale.

"Five cents a bunch, lady! Only—five—centeses—a bunch!"

Something familiar in the shrill cry caught Jessica's ear, but the carriage had turned into Broadway and it was too late to see if that were Sophy Nestor who had called her wares.

Greatly to Jessica's grief the two girls had not met since that day of their brief acquaintance. Sophy had duly taken her stand in the Square and there had watched

and waited for a glimpse of the fair-haired "angel" who had brightened a few hours of her life. But it was Madam Dalrymple, not Jessica, who discovered the girl posted as near her own iron gates as could be without entering them and who had promptly dispatched Tipkins to interview the Square patrolman on the subject. Result: Sophy was banished as a "nuisance"; and, vowing vengeance against everybody who had interfered with her, established herself on the very next corner beyond this policeman's beat. Thence she gibed at and mocked him, with all her gutter eloquence, matching her puny strength against his authority and affecting him not at all, save that he became much interested in the defiant little creature and pitying her for her physical affliction, marveled at the peculiarities of the rich who could call such as she a "nuisance."

There, alas! She had waited and watched in vain for her new friend. It so chanced that for the first time in her life the little Californian fell ill of a slight cold, which Madam instantly magnified into something dreadful; suggesting diphtheria, and other dire diseases, to the portly physician who came in his carriage and looked the small maid over.

"Nothing in the world but a mere cold, dear Madam. There's not the least cause for anxiety. Keep her indoors for a time and she'll be all right. "Then he departed, pocketing his goodly fee, and leaving his old patron of exactly the same opinion she had held all along.

So it was small wonder that on this morning of the shopping trip Jessica should look almost as wan as would have been suitable had she been really ill. The confine-

ment in that poorly ventilated mansion had told upon her who had lived always out of doors, and it had given her time to think much about that other half of the world which dwelt in Avenue A.

Seeing her at last, stirred Sophy Nestor's heart to its depths. Her "angel" didn't look happy. Sophy wasn't happy, herself. Granny Briggs was even more gloomy than of old. The visit of Ephraim had delighted her for the time; but when it was repeated and he had urged her removal to better quarters she had stubbornly refused. It had suddenly come to her New England pride that she was becoming an object of charity and she would not be pauperized, even by an old town-mate whose father had sold her father shoe-leather.

She went even further. She sent Sophy to the Square with the twenty-five dollars in crisp new bills, carefully folded within that cheap scrap of letter paper, whereon she had inscribed her "duty" and her thanks, along with the statement that as no injury had been done no payment was necessary. The frock bestowed upon her grandchild she could not return. That had already been assumed and worn to bed—lest by some mischance it should disappear—a vision too beautiful to be real.

In vain Ephraim argued, scolded, entreated. He was obliged to carry the money back, for Madam Dalrymple refused to touch it, regarding it as already infected by the "poor smell" or some foul disease. And when his entreaties were useless, he quietly disposed the sum in a safe place, awaiting some future day when he could spend it for his old friend, he angrily declared:

"The trouble with you, Sophia Badger Briggs, is that

you over-ate yourself that night. You've been indulgin' your stomach with poor rations and slop victuals and that one good square meal just gave you the dyspepsy. Nothing else on earth ails you. A man with the dyspepsy—or a woman either—ain't in their right mind. They haven't got a correct 'sight' and can't shoot straight. You think you've hit the 'bull's eye' with this cantankerous pride o' yours but you haven't come within a mile of it. However, 'When she will she will, you may depend on't, and when she won't she won't, and there's an end on't.' So I'll take myself back to my pots and pans and when you want me or my help just send that bright little girl of yours after me an' I'll keep step to the music, instanter. Good-by."

So it seemed that Madam Dalrymple's anxiety over the Avenue A acquaintance was useless. "Fortyniner" and Jessica did, indeed, often discuss it, but the matter ended in discussion merely.

"Only, Ephy dear, I can never, never be just the same girl I was before I went to that dreadful place. It's made this 'being one of the richest,' as I shall be, seem such a solemn thing. The money that will be mine sometime must all be used to help such poor folks. It won't be *mine*, really, you know. My mother said that. She said it would be 'a trust put into my hands for righteous disposal.' Those were her very own words. Course, I haven't the money yet. The mine is costing more than it pays out, now at first, but it's coming. Mr. Ninian said there was no possibility of mistake. When it does—O Ephy! It frightens me to think I may not give enough or give it right or, in some way, be unfaithful

to that 'trust.' It makes me feel so old, so old, Ephy dear!" cried the hitherto careless girl, with an earnestness which touched and offended her old henchman, till he agreed with Madam Dalrymple that he'd "give a thousand dollars if that accident had never happened." "Only," he added whimsically, "I haven't the thousand, so it's easy to boast!"

"One good thing there is. Mr. Hale called here yesterday, to see me—to see *me*, Ephraim Marsh! Think of that! He came to tell me what my mother had arranged about my 'spending-money.' It seemed to be so queer, this being an 'heiress' yet never having any money of my own to use. Having to go to Cousin Margaret when I wanted any and always being afraid to ask. Anyhow, that's all past. I am to have an allowance of five dollars a month spending money. All for myself. Isn't that splendid? Mr. Hale says my mother wishes me to learn the proper use of that amount and as I grow older and require more it shall be furnished. As if any girl could possibly want more than that! Isn't it fine? Isn't it? Do say so, 'Forty-niner,' or I shall be so disappointed."

"Land, honey! I'd say anything in the dictionary to prevent that. I only want to give you a bit of advice——"

"Don't, Ephy! Don't give it! I've never had so much advice given me in all my life as since I've come to this New York. Just keep it to yourself, old dear!" cried Jessica, laying her hand upon his lips.

Whence he removed it with a laugh, but stubbornly insisting:

"Yes, I must. Just one word. Don't waste a cent of that sixty dollars per annum on anybody living at 221

Avenue A, rear tenement, top floor. Flambergasted proud old thing! Even the little one's caught the distemper and actually turned up her little pug nose at a peppermint cat I bought for her, t'other day. Fact. Yet the little beggar looked at it so greedy—Whew! Her eyes were as green as the cat's own! But touch it, no! 'I don't care for pep'mints,' quoth she. 'I mean my Granny don't care to have me eat 'em.' I bet all my old shoes they hadn't a mouthful in that cupboard that minute, and old Sophia sewing as if she hadn't another minute to live and must get everything done in that one. A cupboard full of pride, they had. Nothing else. Shucks!"

"You needn't sneer at them, Mr. Ephraim Marsh. I like them for it. I used to think pride was sinful. But it isn't. Look at my Cousin Margaret. Instead of complaining and groaning, like Wun Lung, when he has a pain, she bottles all hers up in her own breast and spares everybody the thought of her suffering. Barnes says nobody knows what 'my lady' endures, some of those 'privacy' times, when she's shut up in her bedroom and never lets on. Then, when she gets a little better, on she puts her prettiest gown and down she comes smiling and sits at table as easy as if she had never ached at all. I think that's fine, Ephy. I think that's the best part of being a 'Waldron,' or any other high-up person, that one is too proud ever to 'let on' and make other folks unhappy. There's so many ways of testing a gentle-person; like Cousin Margaret offering a stranger caller a rocking chair. She keeps one on purpose, though she wouldn't 'demean' to sit in it herself. If the stranger

takes it and rocks, that's the end of the stranger for my Cousin Margaret, for it proves the stranger ill-bred. It's always rude to rock in company, Ephraim, remember that."

"Well, well, well! There's a lot of nonsense been stuffed into your curly head since we struck the trail for this Gotham! Along with some sense, too. But, my 'Captain,' don't you go and get a solemn-ite! I couldn't stand that. The minute you get too good to be wholesome I shall upstake and hoof it back to Californy. And, speakin' of Madam, she's begun to pay me reg'lar wages, same as she would any other 'chef,' as she calls it. So betwixt your allowance and my wages—we ought to feed a good many hungry folks in the course of a year. Eh! What? Who's ringing that bell that way? sounds like the crack of doom; and I vow, I believe they've smashed it! Tipkins is out, Barnes has got the sick headache, no 'emergency' creatur' in for the day, I'll have to answer it myself. Hope to goodness there hasn't anything happened!"

But there had. The direst happening which could befall that ancient mansion.

CHAPTER IX.

“LAYLOCKS.”

ON this same morning Sophy Nestor was early at her post, with her mended tray filled with the second-hand bouquets she bought from the florists or market-gardeners. Second-hand in the sense that they had already been long gathered and were on the point of withering. But flowers in a city cost much money—much, that is, for a fund so small as Sophy’s, and fresh ones were wholly beyond her means.

So she shrewdly disposed her posies on her wicker tray, putting the best blossom forward, freshening them by sprinkling at a convenient drinking-fountain, and losing no sales for want of insistence on her own part. Many bought from her because it was the easiest way to be rid of her petitions, others because they pitied her misfortune; and still more because she had a deft, tasteful way of arranging her wares which tempted all flower-lovers. So, in ordinary, she managed each day to sell all her stock; and this morning, in especial, she hoped for a brisk trade because—Well, because she was going to be guilty of an extravagance which seemed almost like stealing.

“This very sweetest, freshest branch of laylock is for my Jessica Trent, if she goes ridin’ by this way. The market-woman throwed it in free for nothin’, ’cause she

said maybe 'twould bring me good luck. Seems if I might take it and give it, if I want, since I didn't have to pay for it. I always think the flowers belong to Granny and I mustn't give away none, bad's I want. But, to-day, if she *should* go a-ridin' by again—Oh! *if she should!* I'm going to hop right up into the middle of the street, straight again' them horses' feet, and I'll yell loud enough this time to make her hear and look. If she looks she'll smile, sure; and she'll stop if that old White Hair 'll let her. Then I'll fling the laylock square into her lap, as she sets there a-ridin' on them cushions. Oh! my!” murmured Sophy to herself, wanting another listener.

But the Dalrymple carriage did not appear. Madame was in “privacy” just then; which might mean that she was in suffering or under the hands of that person who seemed so mysterious to Jessica—a professional hairdresser. As Ephraim had said, Barnes had also retired with her sick headache, and Tipkins had gone marketing.

To waiting, watching, hoping little Sophy the big mansion looked strangely quiet and deserted; and the hours dragged by without her having courage even to molest a passer-by with her shrill:

“Posies! Only five centses a bunch? Please buy my posies!”

Like the little maid behind those barricading iron lions, at that very moment speculating on the realities of life, Sophy herself fell pondering; and inquired of a vagrant cur who timidly approached:

“Say, doggie, what makes us all so different? I've

asked Granny and all she says is, 'Injustice.' I don't know what that means. I don't know why Jessica Trent wears all the time a soft white dress and I—Well, I wear this one, too, now, only it isn't quite so white as it was. But I dassent take it off to let Granny wash it, 'cause she says it's none too big now an' 'twould pucker and shrink all up, 'cause it's wool. Why does she live in that big house and I in Aveny A? What makes her folks so rich and mine so poor? Hey, doggie? Yes, you may smell o' my posies. Smellin' 'em won't hurt any. I wish—Oh! I wish she would come right out that door and walk up to me and say: 'Why, Sophy! How glad I am to see you!' That's the way I believe she'd talk if she was let. If that White Hair—Whew, doggie! What's that I smell? 'Tisn't them posies. It's more like smoke somewheres. Never mind. I guess that carriage isn't a ridin' out to-day, so I'll just go close up to them iron gates and watch closer. If she should happen to come to the door to look out—If she should happen!—Why then I'd be right on hand and ready, and I'd fire that laylock bunch clean into the doorway and the hall, lickety-cut! Come on! Who's afraid? That old policeman is out of sight, anyway, and besides I don't believe he's half so mad as he pretended. I'll walk right straight along as bold as—as one them lions and—Queer! Where is that smell of smoke. Oh! I hope it isn't 221 Aveny A! But, course, it can't be. That's too far off to smell."

Keeping a wary eye for the return of the policeman, Sophy assumed as nonchalant an air as possible and sauntered slowly up to the closed gates of the great, old-

fashioned mansion, and there forcing her up-tilted nose between the bars resumed her anxious watch. But only for a moment longer. Then the awful truth burst on the startled child, wise in city lore; and, with an agility unlooked for in her poor body, she leaped the closed gates and pulled at the bell. Forgotten now was the precious “laylock,” already wilting on the hot sidewalk, forgotten fear of the policeman and of that more formidable White Hair—Ring, ring, ring!

When Ephraim rushed to answer that frenzied appeal, still clinging to the handle of the old-fashioned bell Sophy fell headlong at his feet; but was up and dashing onward again with the mad cry:

“This house is afire! This house is burnin’ up! Where’s Jessica Trent? O Jessica, Jessica, *Jes-si-ca!!*”

At that moment the “Little Captain” was in the garden. It was the most attractive spot to her in that establishment, and she, with Ephraim’s help, had already reduced some of its disorder to a semblance of neatness. Now, as if guided by instinct, Sophy made her way thither, still screaming her warning cry:

“The house is afire! Where are you, Jessica Trent?”

An instant later she had her arms about her “angel” as if to protect that beloved one at the risk of her own life. Already, other voices than hers had taken up her cry of “fire!” than which there is none more terrifying, and already the door which had been opened to her had admitted many more.

Uproar followed. Clanging engines filled that side of the square. Firemen spread themselves throughout the house, already doomed.

"Must have been burning a long time. Why, this upper floor is but a shell, already!" cried one, and began to pound on the unopened doors to learn if anybody was within the great, shut chambers.

"Madam? yes, she's somewhere on this second floor. The front room," stammered Ephraim, too bewildered to be of much use; and for the first time in his life, since he had known her, utterly forgetting his "Little Captain." Even had he remembered her he would not have feared, knowing her activity and common sense. To get away, out of the endangered structure, would have been Jessica's natural impulse.

Then a man in a helmet came out of the "privacy" so rudely invaded, bringing in his arms a frail, slender old woman, pale as death and almost as unconscious. After her came, shrieking down from a higher floor, poor Barnes; herself in unseemly deshable and announcing to everybody:

"It's my fault! It's all my fault! I was cleaning—a gown—benzine—a candle—Oh! what have I done, what have I done!"

"Destroyed one of the city's priceless landmarks, you old fool, you!" roughly returned a struggling fireman, whose labor she interrupted. "Get down those stairs—never mind the flames—they'll hold you yet, if you go now. Get out—*instantly!*"

Barnes went. More nimbly than she would have dreamed possible and followed where she saw her mistress was being carried, into the nearest drug store amid a crowd of curious strangers. There beside the dazed, half-comprehending Madam she flung herself to earth

and bewailed the day that ever she was born; till, suddenly recovering from her own confusion, Mrs. Dalrymple said sternly:

“Barnes, get up. Cover my head with the corner of this blanket and—and behave yourself. It’s not your house is burning. You are not a Waldron!”

“No, but it’s my fault. I done it. Cleaning that lavender silk, to sell it for a better price. Oh! what shall I do, what shall I do! How can I see it burn?”

“Do? Repent in dust and ashes and never let me see your face again!” cried the tortured Madam, who felt as if the hearts of all her ancestors were being consumed in that blazing pile, where so many Waldrons had lived and died and which she had not left, even on her own marriage.

Barnes crept away; nor was it known that ever afterward she did present herself before the mistress she had served for half a century.

There was no saving anything. From the beginning the old house, that was what the firemen called a “tinder box,” burned swiftly; and when Tipkins came back from market, with his well-filled basket on his arm, he found but a heap of smoldering ruins where had been his lifelong home. It seemed to the faithful old man that his heart broke then and there. But was ever a broken heart known to interfere with what an English butler considered his “duty?” In a moment he had found his mistress and stood before her awaiting her orders, almost as quietly as if it had been the giving of a dinner order, merely. There was none of the frantic remorse of poor Barnes and his quietude helped Madam infinitely,

though now, to outward appearance, she, too, was calm enough.

"Well, Tipkins, we must get under shelter at once. Find Jessica, order a carriage—I don't suppose our own is available—and take me to the Fifth Avenue hotel. Ask the druggist, please, if he has a private room where I can remain until the hack arrives."

The room was found, and the lady conveyed thither; but when Jessica was sought she was not to be discovered. The knowledge of this came to "Forty-niner" first by Tipkins saying, in his most impassive voice yet with quivering lips:

"Just speak to your little lady, Marsh, and tell her the Madam is waiting. We're to go to a hotel for the present."

"Eh? Who? What?" demanded Ephraim, still standing a bit apart from the waning crowd, with arms folded and gaze fixed contemplatively upon the smoking walls. "What a pity! What a horrible pity!"

"Yes. Don't mention it, not yet, please, man. Tell Miss Jessica, right away. I must get Madam to her shelter."

"Jes-si-ca! My 'Little Captain,' you mean? Man alive, isn't she with Madam?"

"No. She hasn't seen her, I fancy. Leastwise, she bade me find the child and fetch her. Hurry up. Madam Dalrymple isn't one to mix with a crowd like this, even under such circumstances. Hurry, now. I'm signalling that hack."

Ephraim's weather-beaten face went ghastly white. For a moment his senses whirled. The next he was

rushing madly into the very midst of the heated ruins, shrieking like one bereft:

“Jessica! Jessica! ‘Little Captain!’ Where are you? Oh! where are you?”

Strong hands forced him back.

“Old man have you lost your wits? Are you seeking death?”

“I shall be—in a minute—if—if—Oh! Has anybody, anybody, seen a little girl? A golden-haired, curly-headed little girl with the face of an angel? Has anybody—seen—my ‘Lady Jess’?”

“Take it calm, old man. Tell it again. A little girl? Is there a child missing? Was there a little girl in that old house? and where?”

“Oh! yes, yes! There was—there is—there must be! *Where?* How can I tell? We—we were sitting—talking—just as if—as if—Oh! my God! as if there was never any danger in the world, when that bell rang and that other child, that hump-backed flower one—Oh! Jessica, Jessica!”

He broke from his captors with the strength of frenzy and would have dashed headlong again to his own ruin, over that heap of flame and broken foundations, but again more hands and stronger held him back. Then somebody found voice to break again into that pregnant silence with the suggestion:

“Try the rear! The alley way! The stables! They haven’t gone yet—We may find—” But even that would-be hopeful voice did not say what they might find.

To the rear they rushed, where an engine and hose

carriage still blocked the way, playing upon the scorched but yet standing stables, whence some thoughtful man had already led the blindfolded, frightened horses. Past these rushed Ephraim, a dozen at his heels. Through the singed alley gate into that ruined garden where the fallen beams and timbers lay thick and smoking.

Then peering frantically here and there, hopefully remembering now how fond his darling had been of that neglected spot, "our only bit of outdoors" here in this great city, Ephraim came at last upon a point whence gleamed something white and soft. But the white gleam was a motionless one, and tottering like a man in a palsy the old sharpshooter raised his shaking hand and pointed toward that distant corner, then covered his eyes with his trembling arm.

Reverently, those grimed firemen lifted the scorched bush from what lay beneath. By the irony of fate it was a "laylock," and had once borne blossoms such as Sophy had that morning cherished. It was she they found first. She was lying with outspread arms, prone on the larger, stronger body of Jessica beneath, as if stretching her own limbs to the utmost, that they might wholly cover the other girl she adored. She had evidently forced the "Little Captain" downward, and, with the instinct of love, broken many branches from everywhere about and heaped them first on the other child. Then she had thrown herself upon these branches and so awaited—What?

A thought of what those children, that little heroine, had suffered in their time of terror blanched strong faces even now; but it was a glad cry that went up:

“This one isn’t dead! She’s only half-suffocated with the smoke!”

“Nor this! Nor this! This yellow-headed one is opening her eyes! Thank God! They are alive!”

Five minutes later the clang of a hospital ambulance came into that alley, whence the engine had swiftly been removed, and upon a stretcher therein were most tenderly placed the two small forms of the rescued children, then—Clang! and away again.

But there stood on the step in the rear a bareheaded, wild old man who would not be gainsaid, whose eyes were blind with tears, and whose constant moan was:

“Oh! my ‘Little Captain!’ ‘Little Captain!’”

Meanwhile, in a rear room of a plebeian drug store a haughty, astonished old lady sat and ignominiously waited; enduring as best she could the peeps and stares of the “common” people.

CHAPTER X.

LEARNING LIFE.

JESSICA opened her eyes from a strangely pleasant dream. Angels had been hovering around her, as it seemed; but, oddly enough, they had not worn the traditional feathers and wings. Some of them were all in white, with white caps on their heads, and some were clad in blue like the sky from which they must have come. Presently, one of the white angels bade a blue one:

“Hold that cup to her lips. She is reviving.”

When the cup was held, “Little Captain” obediently drank its contents, which proved to be something warm and soothing. Then she drifted away again into a sleep that was dreamless, this time; and from which she again awoke to realize completely what had happened and in what sort of place she was.

The “white angel” was a “head nurse.” The blue one an undergraduate. She recognized the hospital uniforms from those she had seen in Los Angeles, while Ephraim lay recovering from his broken limb. She was in the children’s ward. Rows of white beds lined each side of the long room, and on each bed rested a child. On the very next cot to her own, with some doctors and more nurses fussing about it, was Sophy Nestor. She heard one of these saying:

"That is quite curable. It would be a most interesting case. After she recovers from this shock I'll investigate."

Then that doctor went away and the rest soon followed him, leaving only a sweet-faced woman in blue hovering between the two cots, whereon lay these last "emergency" cases. To her Jessica spoke:

"Is Sophy awake?"

"She is waking. Try not to frighten nor disturb her. How are you feeling?"

"All right. I want to get up and go home. Oh! I forgot! I haven't any now, but go to my Cousin Margaret, wherever she is. She must be somewhere!"

"Don't excite yourself, dear. You shall go soon, for you've had a wonderful escape. Do you suffer at all?"

"Some. My hands, my face are smarty and queer. But—did Sophy get burned instead? Oh! she was so good! So strong I couldn't make her stop hiding me with her own self, though I tried and tried. Until it got so hot and I—I couldn't think right. The darling girl! She—Why! What makes her lie that way on her face?" demanded Jessica, rising on her elbow and staring across to the other limp little figure whose hump protruded under the light bed-covering.

The nurse knew it was better to appease one patient's curiosity than to arouse the other, more badly injured one.

"Lie still and I will tell you. She is a heroine. Her back is rather badly scorched and burned, but not fatally so. It has been carefully dressed and it is more comfortable for her to rest as she is doing now than to lie in

a more natural position. She was a brave little creature and, practically, saved your life. Try to help her get well by keeping very quiet."

In ordinary, Jessica was not a crying girl, but the tears chased themselves now down her own cheeks, white with applications to relieve that "smarting" to which she had acknowledged but that already, in view of Sophy's greater hurt, seemed absurdly trivial.

Nor did the wise attendant try to stop this flood, a sure relief to startled nerves and grieving heart. But after a brief time Jessica ceased weeping and whispered:

"Do you know where my folks are?"

"There's an old man in the waiting-room who came with you. He is almost wild with anxiety and, if the head-nurse allows, I will bring him in to see you for a moment. On condition that you will not excite yourself nor the other child."

"Oh! I will be as quiet as quiet! It's Ephy! I'm sure it's my darling 'Forty-niner!' Fetch him, please, right quick! I'll be as good as you want, only let him come."

He came, half-blinded by his grateful tears, as he bent above this darling of his old age, too thankful toward Heaven for speech, and only able to clasp and unclasp her small hands in his own trembling ones, till she asked in a whisper:

"Where is my Cousin Margaret?"

"I—I don't exactly know. Some hotel, Tipkins was taking her. I'll seek her now and tell her the good news. Oh! my lamb, my lamb!"

"There, Ephy, dear! Be good. Now go and tell her

I'm all right and tell her, too, how splendid Sophy Nestor was. She covered me with her own self so that I should not be burned,—she would rather be herself! Go tell her, tell her quick! She thought Sophy wasn't—a Waldron, but, Ephy dear! She is more Waldron-y than any of us! Go tell her, and come back soon. I guess I can be 'discharged,' maybe right away. I'm not the hurt one, only Sophy. And I'll stay just long enough to make her feel how splendid a place a hospital really is and not that dreadful one she used to think."

Indeed, he had to go. He had stayed as long as the nurse thought wise, but it was a far different old man who left that house of mercy from him who had entered it, believing his darling done to death.

By the very next morning Jessica was up and dressed; her scorched clothing replaced by an outfit Madam had promptly sent, with the request that the little girl be taken to her at her hotel as soon as the authorities deemed it safe. That, they decided, might be almost at once. The hospital was overcrowded, there was no room for those who did not really need attention, and Jessica's healthy frame had promptly recovered from the shock of her frightful experience. There remained only the bit of talk that was to be allowed between her and her rescuer. Sitting with her own blistered hands resting on that part of Sophy's body which was least covered by bandages, Jessica said:

"I've got to go away now, darling, but I shall come back. You're going to get well right soon, the doctors say, and oh! Sophy, I heard one of them say, too, that your back could be made as straight as mine! Think

of that! Never to have to be afraid of people looking at you, never to be weak and tired there, any more! Oh! aren't you glad you came? It isn't a real hunchback, you know; only you were let to fall when you were little and got twisted somehow. I think it's like a fairy story. Anyhow, it's just what my darling mother says: 'Life is a chain.' One thing after another form the links of it and none of them happen except God wills. I don't see why He willed that my Cousin Margaret should lose her beautiful old home that seemed more to her than anything in this world. All her pretty clothes and old, old 'antiques,' and just had her life saved. Why, it seems as if all those hunting people on that carpet in the back drawing-room must have felt the flames and suffered!

"Never mind. That's past. What she will do next I don't know; only this I'm sure of, she'll let me come to see you every day; and maybe—maybe, she'll come, too. Now, I'm going. Ephraim is here with the carriage and I must. If you'd like it better, maybe my Cousin Margaret will let me pay for having you in a 'private' room away from——"

"No, no, no! I don't want to be private! I want to feel there are heaps and slathers of folks all around me, just as there used to be in Aveny A. I'd die to be alone with nobody but them doctors waitin' to cut me up."

"Now, Sophy Nestor, you quit that! I've told you before that you didn't know a thing about hospitals. I do. I've lived in one once, away home in California. They're the blessedest places are. Your Granny Briggs is coming to see you this morning. Ephraim is to fetch her in the

carriage, after he takes me to my old lady first. Isn't that funny? Each of us has our own old lady that we think is the nicest in the world! Now, I'm going. Hear me say! Before you've been in this pleasant place even another day you'll think it's just as nice as I do. See if you don't. Now, good-by. I can't begin to thank you. Words couldn't do it. Maybe deeds can, and I'll try *them*. Good-by. Try to be happy and you'll get well quick. Good-by, good-by!"

Jessica found her Cousin Margaret deep in consultation with Madam Melanie and that other dressmaker from the side street. But the Madam instantly ceased speaking to these waiting modistes, to clasp the girl in her arms and to hold her close, close. In that one firm embrace was a world of meaning, from this undemonstrative old dame. Then she released the child, merely retaining one small hand in her own, while she continued her conference concerning the replenishing of the wardrobes so completely destroyed by fire. Neither she nor Jessica had anything left save what they had escaped in; and the simple ready-made suit purchased to leave the hospital in that morning.

The discussion was short. Both these women who had charge of Mrs. Dalrymple's attire knew readily what she would require and undertook that part of the order should be put into the "hurry" department, and be forthcoming almost immediately. That business over, they departed and the two descendants of the race of Waldron were left to themselves, the younger of them scarcely daring to look at the elder, dreading her distress. She need not have feared, in the least.

"Well, my dear, this is unexpected, indeed. But we are very comfortable here until we can get away out of town. We will go as soon as possible. As soon as we have clothes fit to go in. It's early for Newport but I think we'd better settle there at once. I've been looking over an agent's list of furnished 'cottages' and fancy one of them will do. I must send for my man of business first. I think it rather strange he has not already called upon me."

Madam had taken one of the prettiest suites in the hotel, with its comfortable privacy, and already seemed so much at home and so outwardly content that Jessica wondered. Only for a moment, when a servant came to announce a caller, did a spasm of pain cross the fine old features, and give a touch of sharpness to the quiet voice, as she repeated:

"I have already given orders that I can receive no visitors at present. Kindly see that these orders are attended to."

Then Jessica was bidden to relate again the story Madam had already learned from other lips and the girl was delighted to hear her kinswoman announce:

"I will make my first call upon that child, Sophy. We must befriend her. Mr. Hale has been here and has telegraphed your mother of—of everything. Now, my dear, hand me the morning paper; and make your own self comfortable. If you wish to write to your mother, there are the materials on that desk in the corner."

So Jessica wrote:

“MY DEAREST MOTHER:

I am alive. That's about the first thing I can think to say. So is our Cousin Margaret. So is everybody else. It was all Barnes's fault. She said so herself. She used benzine, that seems to be a catchy sort of stuff, and a match near it and first she knew the flames were so big she couldn't stop them. She tried. Ephraim told me. She hasn't been near since and never will, but he saw her on the street outside the hospital where they took Sophy and me, 'cause she was afraid that her carelessness had made her a murderer as well as a house-burner. She said she would have been a murderer if I had died, or Sophy, but we didn't and she isn't. I hope I will never see her again, now, because she would always make me feel angry for my Cousin Margaret.

“O mother dear! I think she is the wonderfulest woman ever could be! I know and you know that she loved the home in Washington Square beyond words, 'cause though it was all tumbling to pieces in spots and the things inside were getting so worn out, she wouldn't sell it even for heaps and heaps of money. I know her heart is just broken inside of her but the break doesn't show on the outside, in her face, not the least littlest bit. She sits just as proud in her old 'comfy' wrapper as she used to in her beautifullest silk gown. Once I tried to say something nice to her, to sort of comfort her if I could, and she just looked at me so queer. 'My dear, spare me. A Waldron never whines, but accepts what comes of either good or ill, as it is meant and sent.' I'm so glad she doesn't whine, nor complain. Granny Briggs does. Granny isn't a bit Waldron-y, though Sophy is—

even more than anybody I know. I think it must be the highest kind of aristocracy to be willing to give up one's life to save another's, and that's what Sophy was. Oh! I love her, I love her!

"My Cousin Margaret is going to the hospital to visit Sophy the very first place she does go after her clothes come. Till then she stays in her rooms, there are several of them, and denies herself to everybody who comes. She's had lots and lots of calls and offers of a temporary home but she doesn't accept. She doesn't need, she says; yet if she did she *would* accept very gratefully. Hasn't she the realest, best kind of pride? Oh! I should like to be just like her, when I am old, only not so fond of putting on new clothes all the time. I heard one the bell-boys tell another that she was: 'The great Madam Dalrymple, the highest up there was in the world of fashion. That it was a prestige for this hotel to have her live here so soon after the accident, and would bring other patrons.'

"Cousin Margaret is going to take a cottage at Newport. That is a place by the sea, if you don't know. She says it will be a big house with every 'convenience' in it, so I don't see why they call it a 'cottage.' Cottages in California are so small and haven't many rooms in them. Never mind. I'm learning things all the time that astonish me. I guess my education has begun already. I remember that Mr. Ninian said that 'Education meant learning how to live, to get the best out of life.' Seems if our Cousin Margaret has got a good deal of the best, since she can stand such an awful sorrow as losing her home and not 'whine' once.

"She seems more disturbed because her 'man of business' hasn't called than by anything else. She hasn't any money, course, just getting out of a burning house that way, not until he comes and brings her some. She has lots of what she calls 'credit' and the hotel folks are terrible polite to her, but she'd rather have the 'cash in hand' to pay in advance. She has never run in debt in her life. She says that is very 'plebeian' and she dislikes plebeian-y things. She sent Tipkins after that 'man of business' and he couldn't get in. He said the bank-office was closed and nobody answered. There were a lot of folks standing around outside the office and he said maybe they had scared the man of business by a 'run' on the bank. He must be a funny kind of a man that would be scared by a few folks just running!

"Now I must stop for a few minutes. If there's anything more to tell, after we've had the dinner the waiter is bringing, I'll write it then. I'm so glad Mr. Hale telegraphed you, so you wouldn't worry, after reading about the fire in the telegraphic column of the paper. Mr. Hale said that bad news traveled so fast that good news had to hurry up and catch it. He is such a nice man. He is going to bring his daughters to see me, soon as they are out of school for the year.

"Good-by, for a little while,

"JESSICA."

The letter was to be resumed and a most important postscript added. As the girl left the desk, eager for the tempting dinner being brought into the room and feeling her blistered fingers sadly painful from her writ-

ing, she was startled by the expression of Madam Dalrymple's face.

The lady's eyes were closed, she was very pale, the newspaper she had been reading had fallen from her nerveless fingers to the floor, and she looked as if, at last, the full force of the calamity that had befallen had crushed her beneath its weight. She neither saw nor heard the entrance of the waiter with his tray nor when Jessica anxiously demanded: "Oh! what is the matter?" did she answer.

CHAPTER XI.

LETTERS AND CHANGES.

It was some time later when, by Madam Dalrymple's request, Jessica added that postscript:

"DEAREST MOTHER:

"Something worse than the house burning has happened. The 'man of business,' has run away and taken all our Cousin Margaret's money with him. At least there's nothing left of it, nothing at all. She hasn't any of that needed 'cash in hand' except the ground the burned house stood on. That seems funny, but the ground can be sold and bring money for itself. Till then Cousin Margaret has had to borrow a little of Mr. Hale. The worst of it is, she says—I heard her talking to Mr. Hale and another lawyer she'd sent for to come here right away quick—the worst is that she is in some way responsible for some other people losing their money. She had allowed her 'man of business' to 'speculate' somehow—Oh! I don't understand, nor does even she. Except that not only has all she thought she had gone, nobody knows where, but some she didn't know she owed, and that she must pay back if she's ever to know another happy moment.

"She and the lawyers talked till she got dizzy, and I

had been all the time. Then when I heard her dear old voice go sort of trembly I dared to put my arm around her and to remind her: 'Don't you worry, Cousin Margaret, my mother and I are Waldrons, too, and we've a copper mine in California that they say is full of money. When we get enough dug out we will pay all those folks and give you back all that "man" ran away with. I think that losing that money isn't half as bad as losing that old home; and don't you care a mite!'

"That was right, wasn't it? And the two lawyers looked at one another quick and Cousin Margaret gave me a little squeeze, and said:

"'That's the Waldron speaking in you, dear. But this is *my* affair, not yours nor Gabriella's. I shall make everything good. Nobody can suffer through me.'

"Then Mr. Hale cried out real sharp, like he used to when the 'boys' plagued him and said: 'That dastardly coward! I hope they'll catch him and shut him up for life!' But the Madam just looked at him, quiet and stern, and answered: 'Don't say that. It doesn't belong to *us* to take vengeance. The poor wretch is suffering more than I am, if he hasn't already taken his own life. Let him go. What is left to me is to get the highest possible price for the Washington Square land and to use it as impartially, judiciously, as I can. Will you two take care of that business for me, reserving for yourselves a just payment for your services?'

"And they said they would but would take no pay. But Cousin Margaret smiled and said the future would arrange all that. So they went away, and she told me to tell you we could not go to Newport now. She has a

little bit of a place on the Hudson river, somewhere, that she bought once when she was traveling through the town just because it was so pretty and would make a nice home for Tipkins and Barnes, if they should outlive her and get married. Now, of course, Barnes never will live there, but Tipkins will. He says he will never leave our Cousin Margaret while he has strength to serve her, and that he has money in the bank enough to keep us all a good long time. He wants his Madam to take it and use it as if it were her own, which it was once. But she thanks him just as sweet and says: 'Not till need be, Tipkins.' I think that was lovely of him, don't you? Ephy is full of schemes for making money for us all. But of course, nobody need to worry 'cause of that copper mine we have; and I'm rather glad we aren't going to that Newport, though I would have liked to see the sea.

"Cousin Margaret has counter—counter-demanded, I guess it is—all the orders about the new, fine clothes. She is to have just a few of the very plainest for herself, and thinks I won't need many either. Till the fall when I go to Madam Mearson's school. Even there I shan't want them, and I am so glad. I think it takes so much trouble to keep changing as I would have had to do if we had gone to that Newport, where rich people live. 'Schoolgirls should dress simply' she says.

"Cousin Margaret says there is a tiny garden beside the little house where we will live, in the country, and Ephy says he will be able to take care of that. If she *will*, that Granny Briggs may go with us, too. Cousin Margaret says she must befriend her, some way.

"Now this is the real good-by. Ephraim is going to put the letter in the mail-box and I do wish it could get to you right away. It is so long—a week to go and a week to come; two whole weeks between us, mother dear.

"Your loving
"JESSICA."

A week later saw Madam Dalrymple and her household installed in the small cottage up the river. Tipkins was still in charge of the house affairs, but old "Forty-niner" had encased himself in a suit of the overalls which Granny Briggs "finished off" and announced himself as "head gardener," with "Little Captain" first assistant.

Sophy Nestor was still in hospital. She was rapidly recovering from her burns and as swiftly learning to love the refuge she had found. Her heroism had won her many friends; also her willingness, now, to have the surgeons "experiment" with her deformity. Concerning this, there was diversity of opinion, with the majority inclining to the belief that cure was possible.

"Well, Doctors, if both the child and her grandmother approve, do you go ahead and try. Let no possible expense be spared. The girl whose life she saved can well repay for any outlay," Madam Dalrymple had assured the hospital staff on the occasion of that memorable visit she had made to little Sophy.

To the crippled child, this was almost more wonderful than the hope of being made straight. To have this beautiful "White Hair" come to that ward and have all

the children in it know that the visit was to her, Sophy! All just because she had once done—Why, what any of them might have done if they had had the chance!

“Roses? Roses—for me—Sophy? Oh! Ma’am, I ain’t worth it! I ain’t half worth it! Roses—roses cost a lot. I know. And ’twas only a laylock that was give to me, free for nothing, that I was going—Just laylocks; but roses! Them kind grows in the hot-houses, I know. I hope—I hope nobody didn’t go without their dinner to buy ’em!” protested the flower-girl, half-crying, half-weeping from sheer delight.

“Ah! no, little maid. Nobody would need do that. Why do you say so?” asked the wonderful Madam in her softest voice, that sounded so like a caress.

“Why, Jessica said you was poor, too, now. Don’t seem so. Don’t ’pear as if it could be,” returned the child, critically regarding the plain street costume of her visitor, and which to the tenant of Avenue A looked as fine as it was new.

“Well, little girl, poverty is comparative. You don’t understand that yet, but you will some day. As for you I trust you will never again be as poor as in those old days before Buster made you acquainted with my young cousin. By-the-way, the broncho is going to be a very happy horse. He is going to live in the country, away from all elevated trains and jangling street-cars, though he’ll not wholly escape from automobiles. Even the country isn’t free from those detestable things.”

“Ain’t it, ma’am? What’s it like, that country?”

Jessica listened, amazed to hear Sophy talking so glibly to her stately Cousin Margaret and to hear that

lady replying with so much graciousness to this once most objectionable girl from Avenue A:

"What is the country like? Like Central Park, only infinitely lovelier. I've a bit of good news for you, too, my child. That good grandmother of yours *is* going with us to our new home. Ephraim Marsh says she 'hails from Cawnco'd,' same as himself and that she is wearing her heart out here in the great city. He says, besides, which is more to the point, that she is a fine cook. So she has promised to go and live with me and do the family's cooking. As soon, then, as you are able to come, you shall visit us and her. Visit, at first, only; because if you are to be made just like you'd wish to be, it will take many months, maybe even years. You will really live at the hospital, while Granny lives with us. But it's only an hour or two between; short journeys by rail or boat, a bit of a ride behind Buster—and you will be in the country itself."

"Oh! O-h!" gasped poor Sophy, too greatly overcome for further words.

"Now, Jessica, bid your little friend good-by. You may write to her and maybe she can write to you—if——"

"Oh! ma'am, I can, I can! Granny made me go to night school and I can write real plain. If I had any paper, or money to put on a stamp on the envelope. You can get them to a drug store and they cost two cents. The stamps do. Maybe, if you didn't mind, some these hospital folks 'd buy one these roses. Then I could. If you didn't mind so very much."

"Can you? Well, I fancy a stamp may be procured

even right here in this hospital and without disposing of your flowers. I will see that it is provided, with all else that is necessary. Ah! you poor, beauty-starved child, to whom roses suggest but sordid money! Well, it will not be long till you gather roses from bushes out of doors, and may they there suggest to you only God's goodness and love!"

This was a rare outburst from the reticent Madam; who was widely known for her liberal, "organized" charities; but who had hitherto contented herself with such, missing the greater delight of bestowing herself—her personal interest and sympathy, which alone make charity worth anything to its recipient.

Then Cousin Margaret bore Jessica away. Granny came for a brief, rather unsatisfactory visit, since the new surroundings in which she found her grandchild always rather abashed her. Ephraim flew in and out, like an excited old child, with his arms full of bundles—of more or less useless contents, like a toy bear and a pineapple cheese—and at last Sophy was alone in that hospital she had so dreaded.

For a time she felt deserted; but it was only on the second day that a letter came from Jessica, containing a stamped, addressed envelope, that made the safe delivery of Sophy's answer a sure thing. Jessie's effusion was not quite so well written as these she had sent home to California, and this explained itself:

"MY DEAREST LITTLE HEROINE:

"We got here all right and Tipkins met us to the station. He'd come up ahead of us on the boat with Buster

and Buster was the trouble. The broncho was all right on that boat and being led up to the cottage—it's just lovely! No bigger than lots in California, so I like it better. Buster had never been harnessed, never in all his darling life. But I don't know how we should get along without him, 'cause he's the only horse we have. Now. Think of that! Just one little bit of a broncho to do all the teaming and plowing and everything for a whole cottage full of folks. Only he won't team and he won't plow and he won't—most everything. You know the span and the carriages and the coachman and footman were all sold after the fire. I mean the horses were. They went to pay our board at that big hotel where it costs a lot of money to stay even a single day. So that horse—Buster I mean, this time—he wouldn't draw the little bit of wagon Tipkins had hired to take your grandmother and Cousin Margaret up the hill in to the cottage, and they thought they'd have to walk. Tipkins was mad and struck Buster and that made me angry, too. Ephraim lost his own temper and said he'd get ahead of that beast or bust. Fancy! 'Forty-niner' calling my broncho a 'beast'!

“After all it was I that got ahead, not Ephy. I just got on Buster's back and chirruped to him and off he went, just as if we were starting to race some other horse across the mesa. Never knew he had that wagon with folks in it behind him, till I told him to stop; and then we had got home and it was too late for him to fuss.

“Now, Ephraim says, I'll have to ride him while he plows that garden, for he's going to have the best, old-fashionedest Yankee kind of a garden that he's seen

since he left Concord. He's going to raise the same old marrowfat sort of green pease that Sophia Badger used to eat when she was a girl, and I do wish you could see that dear old lady! You're going to, soon, anyway. But she is the happiest! Why, she just picks up handfuls of green grass, even, and buries her nose in it and says it 'carries her back to a time when she tramped barefoot after the cows in the pasture.' I shouldn't think that would make anybody extra happy, but it seems to, her. And this morning she came across a little plant of what she called 'Southernwood,' or 'Old Man'—a queer, smelly kind of bush that you never sold, I guess, from your tray—and she burst right out crying! Said her own mother used to always carry a sprig of it to meeting when Granny was a mite of a child. She could see her mother's face, just smelling it, she said. Fancy! Being the mother of a grandmother! Doesn't that seem almost too old to be believed?

"My Cousin Margaret is almost as happy as your Granny. She says life is so simple up here, and it does her so much good to see anybody so glad as Mrs. Briggs. I guess we're all pretty glad and I am so busy that I didn't write before, because you see Ephy went right at that garden this very morning and I've been riding Buster to make him drag that plow without kicking it out of the furrow every other step.

"Do you know, Sophy Nestor? I—it seems almost a wicked thing to say—but, haven't lots of happy things happened just because that old house burned up? And my Cousin Margaret is more beautiful than ever. She doesn't worry a bit. Your grandmother and Ephraim

amuse her all the time and Tipkins is even more devoted than he used to be.

"There seems to be money enough for the little we need, now we don't have to buy so many clothes, and—Ephraim is calling me. He wants to go to a seed store at the Landing and he can't make Buster draw the wagon to fetch him and the tools back again unless I ride on his back. What a good thing it was all around that Ephy came to this side the continent and brought Buster with him! What a good, happy, splendid thing life is, anyway! Write right away.

"Your loving, ever grateful

"JESSIE."

The reply to this long letter was brief and to the point.

"DEER JESSICA TRENT:

"I'll come Soons i Can. I Cant Now. i'm strapped on a Bord gettin' my crook straTened. I'm Goin' to Bee a traned Nurse and live to a hospittle. I'm goin' to be strapped for—ever And Ever, 'seems if. i'm the gladdest ever 't the house burnt up an' Buster nocked me down an' everything. sophy nesTor. Yours Till deth. Cross my hart. good By."

This letter did not reach Jessica, of course, until the day following the trip to the Landing she had mentioned in her own. A trip that amused the people whom she passed along the way because of her novel method of making the broncho "go." A trip that was to have a most astonishing ending and one to fill the "Little Captain's" soul with unspeakable delight.



“She rose once, bobbed a returning courtesy to Jessica’s profound one.”
(See page 73)

CHAPTER XII.

MEETING AND PARTING.

THE seed-and-tool store was at the Landing, close beside the wharf where the river boats stopped, on their way up and down. Across the narrow roadway was, also, the railway station. Between the whistling of engines, the rumbling of trains, it proved a most confusing spot for plain-reared Buster, and while Ephraim entered the store to make his gardening purchases, the broncho did his utmost to stand on his head or his hind heels, and in either direction to cast his rider to the ground.

In vain. The girl had been saddle-bred from her very infancy and wholly understood the vagaries of this four-footed friend.

"Now, boy, behave yourself. I'll neither slip over your nose nor your tail. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? What'll the people around all think of California horses, if you cut up like this? Whoa! There now, that's better! Silly Buster! To be afraid of a train of cars that aren't coming near you. Look at them. See. You must get acquainted with them, 'cause you'll often, often see them. Steady, now. Good boy, Buster!"

A train had whizzed up to the station over the way and whizzed off again. The track lay behind the station; so that, at first, alighting passengers were invisible from the

spot where Jessica waited, perched on the pony's back, which wore a harness instead of a saddle. Even to her it was not a comfortable arrangement and a less experienced rider would have found it almost impossible.

Suddenly, the broncho's eyes wavered from the train they had watched disappearing northward and came back to a passenger just coming into sight around the station. A quiver of some fresh emotion ran through all his sturdy frame, and with a wild whinny of delight he threw up his head and bolted across the roadway. Another instant and Jessica was off his back, in the arms of this passenger, crying incredulously:

"Mother! Why, mother! Is it you? Is it my—*Mother!*"

"My darling, my darling! It is true, then, that you are quite safe, unharmed?" returned Mrs. Trent, folding her daughter close, then holding her off at arm's length, the better to assure herself of the girl's safety.

"And Buster saw you first! Think of that! The pony saw and knew you first! But when—why—where? Ned? How happened—" demanded the excited "Little Captain," without pausing for answers to her hurrying questions.

"*Why?* because it *had* to happen. Did you think I could learn of your peril in that terrible fire and not come to find you for myself? Indeed, I started within the hour after Mr. Hale's telegram arrived, even though it was most reassuring and I see now quite true. But, why are you just here in this place? I stopped at Mr. Hale's office to find the address of Cousin Margaret, but he was out and only an office boy there. Fortunately he

found it on the address-book and I took the next train north. O my darling! My darling little Jess!"

During this fresh embrace a familiar voice broke upon that rhapsody of reunion, exclaiming:

"Not a mite more'n I expected. I've been reckoning time and I 'lowed to-day was about the limit. How are you, ma'am?"

Mrs. Trent released her daughter to take the outstretched hands of "Forty-niner," and to cry, in response:

"You expected me, Mr. Marsh? But I might have known. You were always wise and sympathetic. You'd have done just the same, wouldn't you?"

"Sure. Now, ma'am, I've been cipherin' how's best to get up-hill to that there cottage where we live now. I reckon the 'easiest way is the purtiest way' an' that'll be for me to lead this cantankerous old broncho, that 'hasn't sense enough to go in when it rains,' and you and 'Little Captain' ride up in a 'bus.' There's two or three of them always standin' round, waiting for customers. Baggage, ma'am? Where's that at?"

"Here is my check. It's but a small satchel. I couldn't wait for more—even if I was going to stay all summer."

"All summer, mother dearest? Oh! how splendid! Yet—that won't be but a mite of a time, anyway, 'cause it's summer now. June; just think! I've been here two whole months already."

The mother might have added: "They seem like as many years to me;" but it wasn't her way to dwell upon unpleasant feelings and she had her arms about her child, at last.

What a ride that was! How the happy tongues flew, how questions and answers were tossed to and fro, how plans were laid, events discussed, and the returned easterner felt that she had come into her own again. California she loved. In California she would live and die; but beside this broad old river she had been born and its rugged, verdure-covered Highlands were most beautiful in her sight.

And what a welcome followed, when old Margaret and Gabriella met! How keen the glances with which each searched the other's face and read thereon the lessons life and the years had taught. Through Mrs. Trent's heart shot a swift pain, beholding in Madam the signs of a great grief. Despite the valiant front she would still present to her changed fortunes, the loss of her home had aged her as the flight of time could not. In repose, when no necessity for assumed brightness roused her, she looked to the full what she really was—an old, old woman; world-weary, life-weary, though a “Waldron” still!

Also, though she did not acknowledge it, she was woefully disappointed in Gabriella, whom she remembered as a gay, bright “society girl,” but who was so sadly changed.

To Granny Briggs, who had begun to usurp the confidences once enjoyed by Barnes, she regretted:

“My cousin Gabriella hasn't an atom of style. She's become a regular dowd, living out there in that wilderness. She used to be the most admired girl in our set and was Madam Mearsom's star pupil. She graduated with highest honors—My! But she was a beauty, that

day! in her white gown, of the finest, sheerest French organdie, with billows of filmy lace—I took good care that my ward's gown should be the handsomest of all her class's. Poor Gabriella! Such a pity, to throw herself away on a penniless man when she might easily have married a millionaire and a gentleman of the first family."

"Yes'm. But seems if she was real peart and purty lookin' yet. I don't know much about that 'style,' I hear tell of, but she's got a kind of voice that makes you feel warm in your insides when she talks with you; and that old Ephraim seems to worship the very ground she treads on. I don't know, I ain't no judge for the aristocrats, but seems if bein' loved that way makes up for not havin' that 'style.' What think she'd like best for dinner, to-day? I'd admire to cook her something as nice as that old 'Aunt Sally' of theirs, or that heathen Wun Lung's. Ephraim Marsh, he's makin' great reckonin' on that garden of his'n; but a garden planted in June ain't goin' to be no great shakes, 'cordin' to New Hampshire notions. What say, we best have? Then I'll go buy the stuff of the nighest huckster."

"Anything, anything, dear Mrs. Briggs!" interrupted a voice, glad enough to belong to a girl, as Gabriella peeped in from the little verandah where she had been writing home to little Ned and where she had overheard all the above conversation. "Any sort of eastern cooking is delicious to me. I haven't been so hungry in a long, long time as since I came 'home.'"

Not only to little Ned, whose pride at receiving a letter all his own she could picture, but to that most helpful lawyer friend, Mr. Hale, had she been writing; and

it was due to his kind offices that soon there joined these happy cottage folk another who could hardly believe her good fortune true.

“ Ah! little daughter! That is the best of having this abundance of money—though I can scarcely realize yet, that it is really our own and it's right to use it—that one may make others happy with it. So Mr. Hale has arranged with the surgeons in charge to have Sophy Nestor brought up here to stay as long as we do. I've hired that other little cottage, across the way—that empty one—for we shall need extra sleeping rooms. She is to be brought, ‘ strapped ’ as she must be for long to come, and her attendant nurse with her. The surgeon will run up, now and then, when it is necessary, and her improvement will not be hindered because of her coming. Indeed, the change of air will help her to grow strong. When I think of what we owe that child—I am almost overcome with gratitude.

“ More than that, you and I will sail down to the city, to-morrow morning, and you shall select the very prettiest little set of furniture you see and it shall be for her own bedroom. We will give her one happy summer, if we can, despite that dreadful ‘ strapping ’ and lying still that is the price of her recovery. Ah! my darling! God was good to us when He sent old Pedro to show the way to that copper mine, with its immeasurable results of benefit to the poor and afflicted! ”

That was always the way Gabriella talked. It was ever the one thought of her heart that this now rapidly growing, famous “ Sobrante ” mine was but a trust placed in her hands and those of her children for the happiness

of other people. It made her very grateful, even more humble, to have been accounted worthy to hold this "trust"; and, thus listening to the wise mother whom she adored, little Jessica was in small danger ever of loving money for money's sake.

To them sometimes laughingly spoke the more worldly-wise Madam.

"But shall you never do anything for the Trents themselves, my Gabriella? Shall you be always content to live in a frame house in a wilderness? Is Jessica never to have the benefit of that 'society' for which Madam Mearsom and her own wealth, will fit her? Remember that a little—just a little—is due those poor Trents and Waldrons!"

"All in good time, Cousin Margaret. The frame house has been, is still, the happiest of homes. When you come out to California to spend next winter in the sunshine, you'll see for yourself how cosy we are. There is a hospital to be built, first; for so many, many workmen are coming to our dear Golden Valley, that there must sometimes be illness or even injury. We must have a place to care for them. We must have a fine school. The workmen have wives and children. We must have homes, dozens of those pretty 'frame cottages,' if you please! for them to live in. We must have a church. Maybe I should have put that first. We must have stores and libraries—Oh! there is no end to the things we must have if—if that mine holds out to pay for them!"

Such enthusiasm was contagious. Said the Madam, with mock dismay:

“Hold your tongue, Gabriella Trent! Or the first thing I know I shall be giving away that parcel of land in Washington Square for some ridiculous charity. Just say no more and let me keep my common sense, which you’ve almost talked out of my head.”

“O Cousin Margaret, do give it! Give it, surely. And let me care for you now as you cared for me when I was a girl. The only mother I ever knew—what so fitting as that you should turn your own proud back on this ‘society’ of fashion and come home with me to that other, better, more worth-while society of labor, honesty, and love. You’ll come, dear? Surely, you will come.”

“And leave our Jessica to the snares of this eastern ‘society,’ which ‘toils not, neither does it spin’? We’re a long way from that question of dinner we started with, and you’re here for the summer, at least. One request I have to make. Do me a personal favor. When you go to town, to-morrow, to buy that Sophy Nestor a set of furniture, please also buy yourself a decent gown. Even a ready-made one from a store is preferable to that thing you have on. The sleeves—Why, my dear girl, the sleeves are at least seven years behind the fashion! and there’s nothing so betrays the age of one’s clothes as the sleeves they wear. Since you came here before you got Jessica’s letter—that’s the worst of your California, it takes an age for letters to go to and fro!—since you came before then you must know that I have already ordered a few things for her. They should be finished by this time and sent up. You can inquire about them. Also, you can see Melanie and find out about my own things.

Really, Gabriella, you are coming in very handy! I've been wanting a trustworthy woman to send shopping, since I'm to live in the country myself."

She was in a merry mood, this proud old dame, happy through all her love-hungry nature to have her old ward with her once more. A merry party all; though the mother sometimes thought longingly of little Ned and his "shadow," Luis; wondering what sort of mischief occupied their busy brains at that especial moment. But mostly she was as gay as her own girl. She had come away for a holiday and she was wise enough to take it to the utmost; leaving home cares and fortunes in the capable hands of Aunt Sally Benton, Mr. Ninian Sharp, and the faithful "boys." That Sobrante would not seem really the old Sobrante to them there, with her and Jessica and "Forty-niner" absent, she was sure; but that her welcome, returning, would be all the more delightful and heartsome she was also sure.

"All summer together."

Alas! How swift are summer days! And that one came whereon was parting. Another summer would come and all these with it, it was hoped; but it was a very sad-faced, if most patient, Sophy Nestor who looked about her dainty chamber to bid it a winter's farewell. All that pretty furniture, of white, with rosebud decorations, which had been given to her for her "very, very own"; those soft swaying curtains; that adorable rosebush outside her window, whereon had been the roses right at hand to gather freely as she would; all the love and gayety of that simple cottage life; with Granny grown a happy-faced old lady, and with her be-

loved Jessica attendant on her as on a precious sister—this was ended.

The surgeon had come; the nurse had on her street costume and was waiting; she had herself been capped and wrapped against some adverse draught; and would presently be lifted in strong arms and carried on a comfortable stretcher back to that hospital she now called home.

Then—Why, then, so quick one couldn't realize it—everything was over. Sophy was back on her own little cot in the children's ward, there to become its very life and comfort, so confident and hopeful and uncomplaining was she. She had bidden Granny good-by. Granny who, despising conventions, had been installed in the dearest little flat that could be found near the hospital, and was there to keep house just as they did in "Cawnco'd"—baked beans and all—with Ephraim Marsh as boarder and sole companion. Buster had been put out to board in the village where he had disgraced himself by his own odd behavior. Tipkins—Well, Tipkins, erect and immaculate as of old, had purchased his own new livery and was ready to attend his mistress into those western wilds whither that deluded creature now was bound. Tipkins had his opinion of anybody, even his faultless Madam, who would forsake the "higher civilization" of New York, at this time of year, to live in a frame house on a sort of prairie, with nobody but workmen and horses, and wild ostriches around. Oh! Tipkins knew! he hadn't listened all these weeks to the talk that went on among his betters, without understanding the entire situation, even though he gave no sign.

"Madam is getting into her second childhood!" he had said in a burst of confidence to Ephraim. "She'd never have done such a thing as this, if she wasn't."

"Shucks! Lots of folks and towerists come to Californy to spend the winter. 'Tain't no fool of a trip, either. It costs money."

"Well, yes, maybe. But they go to the hotels, the big ones, and pay high and live like the Waldronses had ought to. But I ain't forgetting what she used to be; and I'm wearing my livery constant, to remind her that there's others that remember it too. I'll show them cow-boys and Chinese laundry-cooks, that I knows what's what, even if they don't; and I'll teach them what a first-class English butler is like."

Then did "Forty-niner" toss back his grizzled head and laugh. How he did laugh! Almost as if he were at that moment on the broad plain of Sobrante where none would be disturbed because of a little noise. And said he:

"Good! Good enough! I like you, Tippy, I plumb do like you. You're straight and white, almost as white as a Yankee. But I'd give all my old shoes to see the 'boys' faces when you arrive in their midst. When you try to buttler your butlery in their presence—I tell you, Tippy, you'll strike it rich! If 'twasn't for turnin' my back on the 'Little Captain,' now, when she's going to need me the most, I'd join the homeward-bound myself just to be on hand when that bottle-green-and-poppy-yeller livery hits the ranch! Oh! Shucks!"

Again that uncontrollable laughter seized him, fancying the face of Samson the mighty, when Tipkins the haughty should appear before him; and bending himself

double he retreated lest this untimely mirth should jar upon the feelings of others, to whom this day brought grief.

In the handsome drawing-room of Madame Mearsom, Mrs. Dalrymple, Gabriella, and poor Jessica gathered for a last embrace. Madam herself supported them by the kindly dignity of her deportment—exactly what that deportment should have been at such a time and such a moment. One glance at her countenance showed her eminently fitted to assume the charge and education of a “young lady of the higher class,” it was so benign, so composed, and so intelligent.

But Jessica had scarcely looked at her. She had eyes, at that moment only for that beloved face of her mother which would vanish in a moment and leave her alone.

Hark! The door has already closed! the dear face *has* vanished! “Little Captain” *is* alone! On the threshold of a new, unknown life.

CHAPTER XIII.

JESSICA ENTERS SCHOOL.

“Now, my dear, I will introduce you to your mates.”

Jessica caught her breath with a sob, but her blue eyes were dry and her face piteously white and grief-stricken. This second parting from her beloved mother had been harder than the first. It was with a feeling of utter desolation that she followed Madam Mearsom into the pleasant recreation-room where most of the pupils of the school were gathered.

These were not many in number ; that number “strictly limited” to those whose guardians were willing to pay an extremely high tuition price. But it is just to add that the price was well deserved. While known as a “fashionable” establishment it was yet a most thorough one, affording its graduates as complete an education as they could have obtained at a woman’s college. In that respect, Jessica’s new home had been well chosen.

“Young ladies, I have the pleasure to present to you, Miss Jessica Trent, of Sobrante, California. I trust that you will make her very happy among you. Miss Rhineland, Miss Trent’s desk will be next your own in the study-room. Kindly do the honors of our house.”

“Yes, madam, with great pleasure,” answered a tall, dark-eyed girl, moving forward with an air as composed and self-possessed as that of the schoolmistress herself.

With a graceful, sweeping courtesy, she offered her hand to the newcomer, who accepted it gratefully enough, yet with the feeling that nothing mattered now.

Helen Rhineland was instantly offended. She was the leader in the school, by reason of her ability and social position. Also, by a certain sort of arrogance which impressed her followers as something extremely fine and full of "distinction." To be "*distingué*" was, at Madame Mearsom's, the height of elegance.

Now, Miss Rhineland's glance swept Jessica's simple costume, of that unadorned blue flannel her mother so greatly liked, and there was disdain in the glance. This disdain was observed and copied by a few.

"Helen's own clothes are very simple—but then! They are of the finest, and cut with such a grace. She is style itself. Why, she's stylish even in her nightgown!" had remarked one young miss to another, and had tried to make her own dressmaker copy this "style"—with poor result.

"Dowd!" "Common!" "pretty enough, but—Oh! my!" "She's simply impossible! I doubt if even Madam can make that new girl over into anybody presentable." "I think it's a shame to admit such people to our school. My father sends me here because he believed it to be so very exclusive. She isn't exclusive. She might be anybody. She might even live—anywhere." "Looks as if she came from California, or some other outlandish place." "She's a dear. How sad she looks and how brave, not to cry when she's so longing to." "I've heard about her. She was the girl that was found in the garden of Madam Dalrymple's mansion in

Washington Square; when it was burned another girl, a flower-girl, saved her life." These were the unspoken opinions that greeted Jessica.

"Helen—Helen isn't—nice!" whispered Aubrey Huntington to her chum and satellite. Now when a school-girl is dubbed "not nice" by her mates, the chances are that she is extremely disagreeable. Also, a person may be that, yet remain perfectly well bred.

Helen prided herself on her breeding, yet she did not hesitate to elevate her eyebrows slightly, as she conducted Jessica to a low chair in the pleasantest corner of the room, where one could look out on the broad Avenue, with its passing throngs and vehicles, and through which a soft September breeze was blowing.

Jessica accepted the chair with a low "Thank you," and turned her face toward the window. The breeze cooled her cheek, that burned beneath the glances of all these strangers, yet the throngs outside but served to increase her own loneliness. In fancy she could hear the "chug-chug" of the train bearing her dear ones far away; and before she knew it the tears were streaming down her face and she could see nothing even of the throngs. She did not attempt to stay them, she could not. Neither did she lift her handkerchief to wipe them off. She was ashamed of her own weakness, it was so un-Waldron-y, and she hoped none of those bright creatures yonder had seen it.

"If she had only let me go to my room alone! Just for a little time till I got used to it!" she thought. Then felt something soft and dainty touch her cheek, got a whiff of delicate perfume, and heard a voice whispering:

“Don’t look ’round. Stare right out the window, hard as ever. In a minute Helen and her clique ’ll be going out—It’s exercise hour; and, lucky for us, I’ve a cold in my head and am excused. I always *do* get a cold in my head, whenever I have a chance. It lets you off so many things. There! They’re going. Madam won’t insist upon you, not this first day. You’re a ‘new-er.’ ‘New-ers’ get scot of heaps of things. Now, they’ve gone; every one except Natalie, and she doesn’t count. She generally is in disgrace, Nat is. Come here, Natalie Graham. This is Jessica Trent. She’s cried my hanky full, give me yours. Hold on. You better keep it and sop her cheeks yourself while I go bring that box of choccies I hid in my bed. I had to take them out the box ’cause that would have showed, but I left ’em in the paper. Whew! Jessica Trent! I never saw a girl cry so much nor such awful great tears in all my life. Nattie’s hanky ’ll be soaked, too, in a minute, if you don’t let up. See if you can’t stop before I get back. I cried, too, the day I was a ‘new-er’ but not that way. Stick to her, Nat, and make her know it’s not so bad when you get used to it. You can get used to anything, you know, even the ‘corrective medicine’ Madame has given to us, now and then, for our complexions.”

By this time the “sopping” process had been thoroughly accomplished, Jessica had ceased to weep from sheer astonishment, and the lively, whispering comforter had betaken herself in search of prohibited “Choccies,” otherwise a rich chocolate dainty. The proprietor of these had never known a grief that a pound of “Huyler’s” could not cure.

Jessica looked after the plump, retreating figure, with its starched and sadly berumpled white frock, its extravagantly large bows that stood out from a brilliant red head at absurd angles, and its odd air of being made up of bits, rudely flung together in great haste. The effect was amusing enough to bring a smile even to her lips, sad though she was, and she demanded of the "sopper" who remained:

"Who is that? Is she a pupil here?"

"That's Aubrey Huntington. Yes, she's a pupil. that is, she's here; but she doesn't pupil very much. She's in so many scrapes she doesn't have time. Anyway, she doesn't need. She's so awful rich. Her father is, I mean, and he gives Aubrey heaps and heaps of spending money, even though Madame doesn't approve. Why, he's richer even than Helen Rhinelander's mother, and that family think they own the earth. Helen's father is dead, and she's an heiress. She's awful smart. Stands head in all her classes and plays the piano to beat the band. Oh! I ought not to have said that. It's slang, and Madame is very particular about our using slang. There isn't much of anything that Madame isn't particular about. But I love her. I certainly do. She's just like a mother to us if we're in trouble, or ill, or anything; except, well, except when we get into scrapes and then she's more like a—a father. My name is Natalie Graham. Oh! I forgot, Aubrey told you. She and I are sort of cousins and Madame used to let us room together. This year she won't. She says Aubrey does me a great deal of harm and I'm not the restriction on Aubrey that I should be, being six months older, so. Some of the girls

room alone. I guess you will, 'cause all the double rooms are full. I guess you'll be in our form, too. Aubrey can draw lovely. I mean she can draw funny; but her folks have forbidden her drawing any more because they want her to study the piano. Her father says he must have somebody in the family that can make a little music and soothe an idle hour and Aubrey's the only child there is, so she's shut off on drawing and pinned down to practising. She won't be long, though. She can coax her father to let her do 'most anything. She says it's a great deal easier to buy a pianola and let the music play itself on that, and she's in for a pianola. She says she's going to be a comic illustrator and make pictures for the funny papers. She could do it, too.

"Seems as if she were gone a long time. I—I bet something's happened! Ah! Here she comes now. Have you got done crying? Choccies won't taste half as nice, if you haven't, with tears on them. Heigho! Aub! What kept you?"

"The 'Snooper.' She's in with a headache, or a fit of the 'snoops' more like. She's got it into her long head that I've been doing something forbidden again, and just casually strayed into my room to find out. First thing she did she sat right down on my bed, kerflump! And there, in that very spot, between the sheets were these precious sweeties. Look at them, will you? Isn't that enough to try the soul of a saint? Which I'm not. Poor choccies! To be smashed by the 'Snooper.'

"So I sat down in the chair and she sat on the bed; and I said just as politely deportment-y as I could: 'Beg pardon, Miss Stewart, but I'm excused from exer-

cise, to-day, on account of my bad cold, and I've retired to my room for a little privacy and—and meditation.' That's where I made a mistake. Saying 'meditation.' 'Snooper's' a faddist on meditation. Says it so improves our souls and a lot more bosh. So she decided she'd stay and meditate with me. And she did. But I ousted her at last. *I sang!* As soon as I began she put up her hand to make me stop, but the higher she held it the more I warbled, and in time she fled. But not till after she'd squashed these dear choccies all flat. Never mind. They were in the waxed paper and we can lick 'em off. Try some, Jessica. There's nothing so good for a broken heart as a fresh cream drop."

Nobody could withstand this nonsensical, merry girl. Certainly not Jessica Trent, even though she did wince at that reference to "broken hearts;" and in another moment the trio were deep in the enjoyment of the sweets which two of them knew were prohibited "between meals" though the "new-er" did not. Also, each was frankly imparting all the facts of her personal history, and the stranger was swiftly learning that there was still a good deal of happiness left in life. Here were "girls," that race of which she knew so little; here was no grave talk of "duty" and "trusts" and the serious matters which interested grown folks; and here, once more, Jessica began to feel as she had used in the old home at Sobrante before any troubles came to it, to make her thoughtful beyond her years.

Suddenly said Aubrey:

"Pooh! My cold in the head isn't bad. It's stuffy in here. It's recreation afternoon, anyway, and no les-

sons till study hour at night. Let's get our things and take a walk."

"Why, Aubrey! How can we without a teacher?"

"A great deal better than with one. It's teacher's day off, too, our class walking one. Oh! come on, Natalie. Don't be tiresome."

"I don't want to be tiresome. I want to go. I'll run ask Madame. Probably she'll tell Miss Leonard to look after us, or she might even send the groom."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Natalie Graham. Madame has a managers' meeting in the big drawing-room. I heard them managing as I went through the upper hall. Miss Leonard is too strict. I'd rather stay at home than go out with that linen-room woman. Come on. I'm off."

Alas! Where Aubrey led the way, the weaker Natalie was apt to follow. Therefore, the first act of Jessica's life at school was one of disobedience. The strictest rule of Madame Mearsom's establishment was against her pupils' going upon the streets alone, without the protection of someone in authority.

But Aubrey was a born New Yorker. She knew, or fancied that she knew, all its streets and avenues, having seen many of them from the safety of her father's carriage—rarely from the point of a pedestrian—save on those prim walks of the scholars, such as most of them were now taking.

Once upon the street, she advised:

"Don't let's go the regular route. There's no fun meeting the others. If we do we'll have to fall into line and go, 'miminy-piminy' just as usual. New York is

all in squares. Let's go by this east square and then around the block home again. We can do that as many times as we like and stay out till we're tired."

"All right. Let's," agreed Natalie, seeing nothing dangerous in such a plan. Nor did Jessica object. She followed in all innocence and ignorance whatever the affectionate Aubrey suggested. But after one round of the block, that lively girl tired of it.

"Pshaw!" There's nothing to see here. I want to see something. Something except brown-stone houses and a few carriages before them. Hark! I hear music! Guess it is a hand-organ! Oh! I love hand-organs! Especially if they have monkeys to them. Hurry up! Come on! Isn't this a lark?"

Natalie made a vain clutch at the starched and fleeing skirt, which eluded her grasp as its wearer dashed onward around the next corner and eastward along a cross street.

"It *is* a hand organ! And there *is* a monkey—The dearest, delightfulest one ever! Hurry up, girls, do hurry up. See? There are children dancing on the pavement. Oh! how pretty and how jolly!"

It was both pretty and extremely "jolly." Older eyes than these have watched the unconscious, small street-dancers, lured from their poor homes by the melody of "Money Musk" or its like, though wheezed from a weather-beaten hurdy-gurdy; and none of these three now remembered aught they should.

For them there was also lure in the music and in the antics of the red-clad monkey.

"Oh! how perfectly, delightfully 'plebeian!'" cried

Aubrey, her own nimble feet keeping time to those entrancing strains and catching Jessica about the waist to make her join in that mad whirl. "I can just fancy Helen Rhineland's face when I tell her, to-night, where we have been and what we've done. Ever been to dancing school, Jessica?"

"No, indeed, never."

"I thought so. Never mind, you'll learn soon. We have the finest teacher in the city. Come on, Nat! Let's take a turn!"

Not one but many; and soon the surroundings changed and even reckless Aubrey paused and exclaimed:

"Heigho! I guess we'd better be going back. The man is putting up his monkey, he isn't going to play any more, it must be nearly supper time. We *must* go back."

"Yes we must," agreed Natalie, earnestly. "You walk between us, Jessie Trent. I'm so glad you've come to our school. We'll have the very nicest times together, we three. Won't we, Aubrey?"

"Indeed, we will," answered she.

But her companions noticed that her voice had lost its usual enthusiasm, and that she now paused to look about her with a puzzled air. As a leader she suddenly felt responsible for her comrades in mischief and remarked, rather soberly:

"This isn't the way. We're going wrong. The numbers on the houses—I didn't know there were such poor houses anywhere, so dingy and so small; but the numbers run up high, as you go north. I know that. In time we'll get to Madame Mearsom's if we watch the numbers."

Unfortunately to have watched the numbers of the streets would have been the safer way, than those upon the houses. These continually grew larger and larger and as constantly more uninviting. Finally, poor Aubrey stopped short. Her ruddy face had grown quite pale, and her breath came fast, as she announced:

"Girls, we are—lost! But we mustn't get scared nor say a word to anybody, nor ask a single question. We must just find our own way home. Else we'll be taken to a station-house, or worse—be kidnapped! That's what my father is always afraid of, that somebody will kidnap me, big as I am, so as to make him pay a lot of money to get me back again."

"What's 'kidnapped?'" asked Jessica in awed and wondering ignorance. Nor did her heart grow lighter when these two, long ago enlightened on that dread subject by the words of maids and nurses, explained to her its awful meaning.

"Then we mustn't ask, as you say. Else I would have called that policeman yonder, just as Mr. Hale and my Cousin Margaret always bade me do if I was in trouble. We'll just walk right straight along, with our heads high up as if we weren't afraid and didn't care at all, and after a while we'll get somewhere!"

"O Jessica, you darling! You're just the nicest ever. You give me lots of courage. Yes, we'll do that. Stop crying, Natalie. Come on."

So they set valiantly forth, though the early nightfall was now swiftly coming; but the "somewhere" they sought was far and hard to find.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE FIRST DAY ENDED.

The three girls walked on till, as Natalie said, their legs "felt like sticks, hopping up and down" and Aubrey was in a frenzy of fear. This was so unlike her that it had a most terrifying effect on Natalie and even Jessica was dismayed. Then, too, she suddenly remembered that she had once before been "lost" on a Los Angeles' street and that a "station house," such as these girls dreaded, had been her refuge. They had come to an open lot, whereon a row of buildings was to be erected, the cellars already dug; and upon some of the stones heaped there they sat down to consult.

"I'd be afraid to go back now. I—I'm awful afraid, anyway. I guess, I guess our 'lark' wasn't so nice as it seemed. I was never out in the dark like this, without grown-ups with me. Madame—I daren't think of Madame! Nor of my father. The last time I got into disgrace he said that the next time he would punish me by making me stay at school during all the Christmas holidays. And now—the 'next time' has come. Madame will never overlook this runaway."

"Aubrey, hush! Don't!" cried frightened Natalie, more disturbed by these words of her leader than even by her present condition. Till then, though anxious, she

had not had the least doubt but that they were still on that road to "somewhere" which Jessica had suggested, or that "somewhere" would not be in the immediate vicinity of their school.

"Do you mean that we've done wrong, real wrong, coming away without being told we might?" demanded Jessica, with sudden anger.

"Course. You didn't think we were doing the other thing—'right'—did you? Madame will punish us awfully if—if we ever get back. She'll stop our pocket money and give us extra lessons and—Oh! dear! I wish I'd never—never come!" answered Aubrey, collapsing to that degree she sobbed aloud.

Natalie also began to wail, in an audible and most distressing manner. She was a girl greatly afraid of "the dark" and the dark was swiftly coming. October days are short, even when brightest, and the sky was now overclouded with signs of an approaching storm. An icy breeze swept round the open place and set them shivering, and the keen hunger of healthy schoolgirls added to their discomfort.

A policeman came along and Jessica made prompt decision; calling eagerly:

"O sir! Will you tell us how to get home? We're lost!"

He stopped and came toward them, even though Aubrey and Natalie clutched at her frock, whispering: "Don't! That station-house!"

"Where *is* your home?"

Without thinking Jessica replied: "Sobrante, California."

"Whew! Quite a distance, that! However, where are you staying here, in New York?"

Aubrey had regained her courage and drawn near and promptly gave Madame Mearsom's address.

"Hmm. That's a long way, too, though not so bad as California. There's no street car-line will take you, convenient, but—have you any money?"

"Not a cent."

This was odd. Girls wealthy enough to belong at a fashionable boarding-school, on the street alone at this time of night without any money—things began to look dubious. Besides, and here the astute officer scanned their attire, they were none of them richly dressed. They were very likely runaways from some reformatory, or public institution, and the best place for them, anyway, till their story could be sifted, was the nearest station-house. This was not far distant, and thither they were now escorted, despite their voluble protests.

At least Aubrey and Natalie were voluble, and Jessica listened, growing wise. To be shut up in a station-house meant the worst possible disgrace. It meant, probably, a prison, and though they had sometimes felt that the Adelphi, as the Mearsom establishment was called, was "as bad as a prison" they changed their minds when confronted with the real thing.

At last "Little Captain" got her own chance to speak and said:

"I've thought a way out. If this kind policeman—" the other girls shuddered—"if this kind policeman will either get a carriage, to take us to 'Forty-niner's,' or will send for him to come to this station-house, it will

be all right. My Ephraim will pay for us if there is anything to pay and will take us either to his flat or to Madame's."

The officer was not only willing to do this but it was his duty; but it was a very grave little group which waited in that big, bare room of the building while Ephraim was being summoned. Fortunately, the apartment he occupied was supplied with telephone fixtures, and he had been as charmed as a boy with the idea of talking over a wire with his "Little Captain," whenever he felt inclined. So he promptly had the proper "connections" made and was now reached without difficulty or delay. Indeed, that "Hello!" was never more promptly answered than when it brought the information:

"There's a girl in this station says you know her, Jessica Trent. She wants you to come and take her—wherever she belongs. There's three of them."

Ephraim sprang away from the instrument with a shriek.

"Do you hear that, Sophia Badger—Briggs? My little lass, she's made herself into three Jessica Trents—and gone and got herself into the lock-up! Wasn't it well I stayed behind with you? Didn't travel back to Sobrante with the crowd? I knew it. I felt it in my bones my girl 'd want me. She can't do without her old Ephy, yet! Thank the Lord I'm here! Where's my hat? I say, Sophia Badger, where's my hat?"

In a state of wild excitement, the sharpshooter tore round and round the tiny rooms, into one and out of another, searching everywhere for an article he felt was

necessary if he would make a respectable appearance at that dreadful police-station; but which he wouldn't have delayed for, had not so much been at stake.

Poor Granny was equally flustered. She had learned to love Jessica almost as much as she did Sophy, and the very name of "station" held terror for her. So many, so very many of her old neighbors in Avenue A had journeyed to such a place and had not returned, having been forwarded to "the Island" for a longer stay.

It was impossible to connect innocent Jessie with any crime, yet what but crime could send a girl old enough to tell where she lived to such a place? So perturbed was she that she unconsciously thrust her spectacles up over her cap, the better to see, and thus discovered the missing object.

"Well, Ephraim Marsh! If we ain't two old fools together! Your hat's on your head and has been all the time. More shame to you, wearing it indoors so much, as you do."

But he did not tarry to hear her reproof. With a disgusted "Shucks" he was off and away; hailing the first cab he saw and with a recklessness new to one of his thrift, offering the driver double pay if he would make double-quick time. Therefore, it was sooner than they had hoped when he joined the waiting girls; two of whom were rather surprised to see the third throw herself into the veteran's arms with a cry of delight:

"O Ephy! you darling! I knew you'd come. I knew you wouldn't fail! But, Ephraim, what shall I do?"

This very day, this very first day without her, I've done that will almost break my mother's heart. I have—Oh! I am so unhappy!”

Now did the sharpshooter's face take on a sternness all unknown to “Little Captain” as, putting her away from he demanded:

“Out with it! Tell the whole story from A to Izzard. What you done? It can't be—the sky hasn't fell yet!—it can't be that you've *took what didn't*—What you done, quick?”

She understood the horrible suspicion that his scant knowledge of station-houses had aroused and was indignant in her turn, but promptly related the not very “criminal” events of the past few hours; ending with the request:

“Will you take us back to Madame Mearsom's in that carriage you came in? She has money of mine and—Oh! do, quick, quick!”

A gentleman approached, with notebook and pencil in hand. He was courteous and interested, and eager to serve the paper which employed him, but Jessica had been instructed by Ninian Sharp concerning reporters and their ways and her heart took instant fright. With an appealing gesture she cried:

“O sir! Please don't write this down. Don't let it get printed. If it did and my mother saw it, as she would, 'cause now she reads all the New York news quick, it would break her heart. If it didn't that it would make her dreadfully ashamed because—because we are the Waldrons and mustn't do disgraceful things. Please, don't write about it, please.”

The man was young and anxious for "copy" and its wage, but he couldn't withstand that petition.

"All right, then, Miss. I won't. But it seems a pity—might make a good story—However, let it go."

So it was due to the lessons of far-away Ninian that this escapade was kept out of the city papers and Madame Mearsom spared the chagrin of seeing it in print. How it affected her when, a half-hour later the runaways were once more safely in her presence, they were yet to learn. At present, all she did was to thank Ephraim for his escort of the girls and to offer repayment of the carriage hire.

"No, ma'am, I thank you. There's nobody beholden. I've got a good job now, a-teachin' customers to shoot in a shooting-gallery up-town. My hours are from seven till 'leven and I must be goin'. About what time of day is it most convenient for you to have me visit 'Little Captain.'"

Madame's countenance underwent a curious change. One could not say just what this was, yet old "Forty-niner" felt that he had not pleased. Her answer was disappointing:

"Our pupils are at liberty to receive their friends once a week, on Thursday afternoons, from four till six. Good evening. Young ladies, attend me, please."

Mr. Marsh went away a perplexed man. He had remained behind in New York simply to be near his beloved girl. If he was to be allowed to visit her but once a week and then in presence of other people, including that stately Madame—as her words seemed to imply—

there wasn't going to be much comfort for either him or Jessica.

"But I'll stay, all the same. The idee! Only part of a day under that woman's care an' the care so slack 't my little miss landed in a station house! More'n that, though she seemed dreadful relieved to get her scholars safe back again, I 'low that schoolma'am isn't apt to give 'em no great shakes of a supper. Wish Jessie was going home with me now to Sophia Badger's fried oysters. Early in the season for 'em, the market man said, but I'll relish 'em. That's one good thing about the east and as poor in Californy—oysters is plenty here and scurce there. Heigho! What next 'll happen, I wonder."

Left at the Adelphi Jessica felt once more forsaken. As soon as they had reached her own private sitting-room, Madame Mearsom made each pupil tell her story, that by this triple repetition she might arrive at the exact truth. When they had finished, she said:

"Aubrey, you are the one most at fault. You will retire to your room where supper will be sent you. You will be put in 'solitude' for a week and you will not go out of doors, except to take your exercise in the garden, during the same length of time.

"Natalie, you may go below and ask a maid to serve you, though it is long past the regular supper hour. You will then retire to your room, study the lessons for to-morrow, and remain there for the rest of the evening. During the week of Aubrey's confinement you are to have as little to do with her as is consistent with good breeding and the duties of your form.

"Jessica, you will remain with me. I have not yet had my own supper and you may share it. I will also improve the opportunity for examining you as to your scholarship.

"Aubrey and Natalie, I wish you good night."

Each culprit turned and made a reverent obeisance, then slowly retired; but not before Aubrey had had time to make a grimace in Jessica's direction and, by a vivid pantomime, to declare:

"I'd a deal rather be in my own shoes than yours!"

But at that moment the Californian was pitying the other because of the "solitude" imposed; which, however, later experience proved was nothing more serious than being debarred from the general amusements and occupations of her mates. "In the school but not of the school" was their own definition of this punishment, and to lively Aubrey the most severe.

It was a very dainty supper served to Madame and her pupil; and so gentle, sympathetic, and full of understanding did that lady now seem, that Jessica was speedily talking with a freedom she had not dreamed possible.

Gradually, by skillful questions and frank answers, the schoolmistress learned all of the "Little Captain's" life; and realized how difficult the girl would find the necessary discipline of her future. Not until the dessert was finished and the white-capped maid had carried away the trays, did the subject of the afternoon's "runaway" come up. Even then it was lightly dismissed with the remark:

"Of course, now that you know better and under-

stand that nothing must be done without the approval of some authorized person, you will not transgress again. Aubrey is a dear child; as warm-hearted and lovable as one could desire; and in time—in good time—she will develop into a charming woman. Only be on the watch while with her lest her ‘fun’ should lead you into mistakes. For Natalie, I may say the same, except that Natalie is a follower as naturally as Aubrey is a leader. One afternoon has made you close friends with two of your mates—a mutual ‘scrape’ seems to be a certain bond between girls—and before long you will know them all. The same sorts of persons you will meet, by and by, in the world at large. As you influence them now, or are influenced by them, will you do then.

“Now, that is a good deal of a sermon for me. I don’t often lecture my girls; for I want them, and I especially want you—Gabriella’s daughter—to look upon me as their best friend, their second mother, and to confide in me as they would in her. Now, kiss me, Jessica, and let us call the slate washed clean of this unfortunate happening. I thank you for preventing that reporter recording the episode in the public press, as I judge you did. It was very wise in you. I hope you’ll prove as wise in other matters.

“For instance, here is a real slate. I’ll write on it a real example and let me see what you know of practical arithmetic.”

Jessica’s heart sank. Already she had fallen in love, after impulsive schoolgirl fashion, with this stately woman who could yet be so gentle and so kind, and she foresaw defeat.

"Yes, Madame Mearsom, I'll try. But—I know you'll be dreadfully disappointed. I—I don't know anything, seems if, after hearing those other girls talk."

"Don't say that. There may be a difference in the amount of knowledge and in the kinds. You have brains enough. Don't disparage them. Remember what Goethe said: 'What you can do, or think you can, begin it. Boldness hath genius, power, and magic in it.' That's only a simple example in arithmetic. Be bold and say to yourself 'I'll do it!'"

Madame leaned back a little in her high-backed chair and took up the evening paper, while Jessica fixed her eyes upon the written problem. Alas! the figures danced before her as if they were bewitched. Do her utmost she could not possibly tell what would be the difference in the amount of labor performed by two men, one working eight hours per day for eight days, and the other ten hours on six days.

After fifteen minutes of hopeless computation on her part and patient waiting on her examiner's the student cried:

"I don't know. It seems as simple as A, B, C; but I haven't the least idea of that 'difference,' I don't see an atom of sense in the whole question. I—I hate arithmetic, anyway."

"Oh! no you don't. Hate is too strong a word for a young gentlewoman to use, except on the extremest provocation. You simply do not know. That's nothing. You *will* know some day, soon. That's why you're here. Let us try geography. Where is Prince Edward's Island?"

"I haven't the slightest idea!" cried poor Jessie, with scarlet face.

"How many kings of England have been named Henry?"

"I didn't know that any had been."

Madame smiled. Here surely was "virgin soil" wherein to plant the seeds of learning.

"Do you know anything about the government of our country? In what it consists?"

"Course. There's a President and—and—and other folks."

"Perfectly correct. We will pass over the 'other folks' till a future day. Please spell 'separate.'"

Mr. Ninian had drilled Jessica during the winter past on the fine art of orthography and here, at last, she felt herself secure.

"Oh! I can, easily: 'Sepperate.'"

Madame Mearsom folded her paper and touched a bell. A maid appeared, and received the order:

"Assemble the young ladies for evening prayers. Then return and show Miss Trent to her room and see that she has everything comfortable. She is excused from further exercises on this first day."

Then to this abashed "new-er" she said:

"There is no 'form' at present existing in the school which you are fitted to enter. I will arrange a special course for you and special instructors. Good night. I hope you will sleep well."

"Sleep well!" thought poor Jessica, tossing on her white bed in the charming room assigned to her. "Why—I was never so ashamed in all my life! I—I know

she knows I don't know anything! and the 'boys' said I was so terr'ble smart! Sleep? I'm too mortified to sleep; 'cause though she didn't tell me I know she knows——"

But promptly, amid this maze of "knows" and "don't knows" and with the hot flush of mortification on her cheek, our heroine had passed into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XV.

A TEXT FROM GOETHE.

JESSICA had gone to bed a homesick, ashamed, discouraged girl. She awoke, full of determination to conquer all the difficulties of this "education" which had, last night, seemed so formidable.

As she stood before her little mirror, brushing the yellow curls into that semblance of order which was their morning state, and that so soon gave place to a tangle of glistening threads and escaping tendrils, she regarded herself with severity.

"Jessica Trent, you may be going to be 'one of the richest' sometime, but at present you are a simpleton. You've got everything before you—not a thing behind, except—Well, except knowing how to ride a horse or an ostrich, or hit a bull's eye, or a few other things that Madame Mearsom would surely say were 'unbefitting a gentlewoman.' I used to love that word, hearing my mother use it. I begin—I begin to hate it! Humph! There goes, already! A gentlewoman doesn't say 'hate.' But listen, you girl in the glass. I'm going to study so hard I'll catch up with that lowest 'form' I'm not clever enough to enter yet; and I'll pass it by. Then I'll tackle the next one, and leave that behind. I'll—get to be the highest-up, intelligentest—that doesn't sound right

but you know what I mean, Jessica Trent. I'll be the head of the school, as Aubrey said that handsome Helen Rhineland is. I'll take care to keep every rule and I'll find out what they are. And I'll do it all for love's sake—for my mother! I made a bad beginning, but 'Little Captain,' hear me say I'm bound to make a good ending. I WILL! Right here and now I'll write that poetry out, which Madame quoted from that Goethe. I know who he was, my father had his books in his little library. Maybe, who knows! it might have been that very verse which encouraged dear father to go ahead and start Sobrante and try to help so many people. He believed he could 'do' it and he did. I remember it exactly."

Taking a sheet of the school paper which was supplied to each girl's room, Jessica wrote in her very best hand, and in that large size which would make the script readable from every part of the room.

"What you can do, or think you can, begin it.

Boldness hath genius, power, and magic in it."

This she pinned to the mirror-frame, and, after her brief devotions, she answered to the "assembly bell" that summoned her to the hall below; and entered as "boldly" as if her heart were not beating very fast and her cheek glowing very red, meeting the curious gaze of her schoolmates.

Of course, the news of her escapade and Madame's anxiety concerning the three absentees from last night's table had spread through all the forms.

Helen Rhineland had emphasized the fact that "one must expect such things from a wild Westerner and that

for her part, she felt Madame had made a great mistake in admitting such a creature to the Adelphi. Pretty? Well, yes, in a certain way; but no style. Not an atom of style; and style was the one thing neither money nor education could procure. It had to be born in a person," said Helen, with decision, and all her coterie chirped: "Yes."

However, Helen was but one, although her influence held many. Also, there may be counter-influences even more powerful than wealth and style. Along with the discussion of last night's affair was circulated by some braver spirits, the fact that it was the young "Westerner's" cool sense which had extricated the trio from a most unpleasant position, and that Madame was smiling affectionately upon her, as she now crossed the hall to the seat assigned her.

The smile which Jessica flashed back into that motherly face expressed something of the thought she had had while brushing her hair. At least, Madame, long versed in the study of young girls' faces so interpreted it; and now she not only smiled again but nodded her white head in approval.

Prayers over, the family marched quietly out to breakfast, that was as liberal in quantity and as faultlessly served as it would have been in some big hostelry. A small matter in itself, some might have said, but a detail of infinite gain in the matter of the Adelphi's success. Also, an excellent equipment for the day's study that was to follow. "Healthy bodies make healthy minds" was one of the schoolmistress's maxims; a maxim nearly always correct.

After breakfast there came a half-hour of recreation, passed usually in the garden or conservatory behind the house. Then a silver bell struck the school hour and each girl filed to her place at her own individual desk in her own form class-room.

This was Jessica's first glimpse of a time-regulated household, and she was so absorbed in watching the others that she scarcely realized she had been left behind, alone, till a pleasant-faced teacher addressed her:

"Miss Jessica, you are to be my 'special' for the present. I am Miss Montaigne. This way, please. We are to have a cosy little spot quite to ourselves, for a time."

"Good morning. I will try not to give you much trouble, Miss Montaigne, but I am very stupid. I don't know anything, really."

"All the more enjoyable then, to learn. I am so fond of study myself that I fancy everybody else must be. Sit here, please."

The place was but an alcove, opening into the lower form class-room, but isolated from it sufficiently that what went on within between teacher and pupil could not be overheard. A very haven of comfort for Jessica, had she been really as stupid as she felt; and one that soon became to her the very dearest spot in all the great building. In reality, she was now so eager to learn that she could have "tackled," as she called it, every branch of study represented in the institution at once and altogether. But Miss Montaigne would have none of this.

"Madame has been a most successful instructor and she allows no overcrowding. Two studies at a time,

with an 'accomplishment' is her rule. We are to take up arithmetic and spelling first. With music, or art, or what your taste decides. Now, we'll begin. This sum in addition, if you please;" and the teacher pointed to the very simplest possible.

Jessica glanced at it in contempt.

"That? Why that's far easier than making out the 'boys' wage-list. You must be teasing me!"

"No, indeed. Beginning at the root of things. That's all. You may climb and grow as fast as Jack's beanstalk if you wish. I'll help push!"

Why, what a delightful person this Miss Montaigne was! Almost as good as another girl to talk with, and how like a game she made that "hated" arithmetic seem. It *was* a game. Played so swiftly and eagerly between these two that before either noticed how the time was passing the recess hour was struck and—such a babel of happy voices as followed it.

Desks were deserted, mates sought mates, Aubrey alone mourned sorrowful in her corner, though Natalie rushed into the alcove and whirled Jessica out of it, disputing with somebody across the room:

"You're a mean, hateful girl! It is no such thing! She isn't! She's a dear! Aren't you, Jessica Trent?"

Jessica returned the ardent hug she received with another as fond, then holding Natalie off demanded:

"Who are you quarreling with? What did she say?"

"That top-lofty Helen Rhineland. She calls this the 'dunce's corner' and that you wouldn't have been any more conspicuous if Madame had stood you on a stool with a cap on your head. I don't see what's the

matter with Helen. She's hateful enough all the time but she's never been quite so unpleasant as since you came, yesterday. I—I wish she'd behave."

"So do I. What's more I'll make her yet!"

"Why—Jessica! How can you?" asked the other girl, astonished, as a group of schoolmates drew near, anxious to know the "new-er" who had already so stirred the quiet depths of the school.

There was a flash of "Little Captain's" blue eyes, as she answered:

"I don't know just how yet but I will. I'll make her so ashamed she'll want to hide her head. Madame said she was a real gentlewoman, and if she is her hatefulness can't be deep. I'll conquer her by kindness, as my mother says is the best way with ugly folks. That's the way she did a Chinese cook we had at Sobrante, and who was—horrible. But he got over it. Nobody could be nicer than Wun Lung is now."

"Let's go out into the garden. The 'Mums are just beautiful now. Do you have chrysanthemums in California, Jessica?" asked another girl, slipping her arm about the stranger in such a friendly manner that Helen Rhineland's coldness was forgotten.

"Little Captain" had always won liking, wherever she was known, because of her keen interest in other people and her forgetfulness of self, nor did she fail now. One by one, her fellow students, even from the higher forms, gathered about the stranger, listening to her "Californian talk"—a subject which made her tongue run glibly; and so graphically did she describe life at Sobrante that she made these New Yorkers envious of its freedom and

constant sunshine. But not a word did she speak of her prospective wealth; and, oddly enough, from this reticence the notion spread that she was in reality a poor girl.

“One of Madame’s charity pupils. The daughter of a former ‘Adelphian’ who can’t afford to pay for her. That’s why she’s dressed in such cheap stuff. Well, she’s nice. She’s real nice, even if she is the ‘stupidest girl in school,’ and I shall treat her just the same as if she were one of *us*,” said Rosalie Thorne, a sweet-faced senior who was Helen’s rival for “honors” and was greatly beloved of both teachers and mates. She was, also, a very conscientious person and, perceiving Helen’s attitude toward the “wild Westerner” set herself to use her own influence in an opposite direction.

Thus it happened that Jessica’s coming had divided the school into two factions; which promptly elected themselves to be “Pros” and “Cons,” and beginning with the toss of one haughty young head had grown like that veritable “bean stalk” to which Miss Montaigne had smilingly referred.

But Jessica, the innocent cause of this disruption, took it lightly. Sufficient for her the fact that there were “Pros” enough to more than satisfy her longing for “girls,” and that these were almost as admiringly affectionate as even her “boys” at home. So, before many hours passed she was so happy that “she almost felt wicked,” remembering how desperately sad she had been at parting with her mother. She even questioned Madame Mearsom herself upon the subject:

“Dear Madame, is it right for me to be so glad? Is

it like turning my back on mother and Cousin Margaret, and all the rest of the grown-up folks? I'm not forgetting, you know. I'm not really forgetting; only there doesn't seem to be room in my heart for sorrow and all these good times together. This is the very first time I ever lived with girls and I think—I think they are just too delightful for words!"

Whereat Madame patted the little hand which had stolen to her shoulder and answered, emphatically:

"It is most certainly and entirely right. That is why you are here—to be happy. I can send no more pleasing message to Sobrante than that you are so 'glad.'"

One thing alone really disturbed Jessica's full content. That was the peculiar behavior of Ephraim Marsh. Invariably, when the day was fair enough for the "Adelphians" to take their accustomed walks, "Forty-niner" would appear on the opposite side of the same street. He would march along, head erect, "eyes front," as if keeping step to some invisible band—his whole attitude as correctly military as he could make it. Never, by any possibility, did he recognize Jessica, nor answer to her excited hand-salutes—the only sort she was permitted on the street, or from that distance—and this hurt her sadly. More than that, he never used his visitor's privilege of "once a week, on Thursdays, from four till six."

"All the other girls have their friends come to see them, Ephy dear. Why don't you?"

He gave her no explanation, simply said, each time: "I'll see." Not for anything would he have confessed to her that his proud old heart had been offended by

Madame's slowly pronounced reply to his question concerning these visits, for which his own soul hungered unspeakably. He only urged her to get leave to come to the flat as often as she could, even though such calls were as unsatisfactory as possible.

"Couldn't you come without that teaching woman tagged to you, 'Little Captain,' not even once? I'd come for you in a hired carriage and I'd pay the taxes for it if it took my bottom dollar—which it wouldn't. I can't half begin to use my wages, as a teacher myself, and Sophia Badger-Briggs being such an equonomical housekeeper. I take Sophy posies, but I daren't send 'em to you. Them windows to your 'Adelphi' are always chock full of flowers anyway."

"Yes. There's a little conservatory, you know, in the garden. Besides the girls' folks, the rich folks that have always lived in New York, send flowers. They consider it so 'refining'; but, Ephy dear! I'd give all my year's allowance just for one dear, yellow California poppy, instead of these 'American Beauties' and orchids. Never mind. We'll be going home sometime and can gather them for ourselves, and I am, I certainly am, very, very happy. Why, Ephy! I'm learning so fast, I'll be admitted to the lowest form very, very soon. And I'm taking fiddle lessons. I mean violin ones. I sing, too. Madame says I have a very good 'organ'—that's something in my throat, you know—though I'll never equal Gabriella! That's mother. Gabriella was the 'star pupil.' She stood head of everything. Sometimes, when I get pretty tired I feel as if it were dreadful to have to live up to my mother! I don't see why they don't have

stars at both ends of the class, top and bottom; then I'd be a star, myself, without any trouble. Ephraim Marsh, did you know I was a dunce?"

"Shucks! No. Nor nobody knows it. 'Tisn't so. If you aren't the smartest——"

"No, Ephy, it's sadly, desperately true. The things I don't know would fill—would fill Madame's 'unabridged dictionary!' I get almost discouraged, times; but I do love to learn things. I love it. Only I can't learn them half fast enough. I want to get to be a 'star' right away quick."

This was on one of Jessica's brief visits to Granny Briggs's "apartment." The girl had been corrected for speaking of "flat." Miss Montaigne who had accompanied her special charge was reading a book she had brought with her in the tiny front room, called the "parlor" by the proud mistress of the little establishment. In fact, she disliked her own present, enforced surveillance of the trustworthy girl, who had grown up under the faithful care of the old frontiersman; but Madame's rules were inflexible. Her young ladies must be attended during such calls by some employee of her own.

Jessica suddenly remembered the young lady in the parlor and pushed aside the plate of Indian pudding which had been part of Granny's "New England dinner."

"Oh! dear! I suppose I must go now. Dear Ephy, do stop that angry tramping up and down! The little dining-room isn't big enough for such a great old fellow as you to go 'rampagin' in. We're going to school, both of us, aren't we? But, have patience, we'll graduate

sometime—with honors or without them, who knows? And then we'll go home."

"You believe we will! Why, 'Little Captain,' I'm saving up again' it already. It shan't cost anybody but Ephraim Marsh, one single cent for all this coming and going, these betwixts and betweenes, and all the whole enduring business of living in New York till we get graddyated. Shucks! What's Sophia Badger doing now?"

What, indeed! Could that hospitable creature, who had neither hesitated nor been ashamed once to offer her last slice of bread to a chance visitor, could she do less than hunt out her one plate which had a trifle of decoration about it, and heaping it with the really delicious pudding carry it into her parlor for Miss Montaigne's delectation?

Ephraim was aghast. He was more afraid of the prim little "special" than even of the Madame herself, for the younger woman wore "glasses" that magnified the eyes behind them into something really formidable. Besides, however she might lay aside austerity when with her pupil, she assumed the most dignified of manners when abroad.

That is, she had done so, heretofore. But Granny Briggs—even the rule-encased schoolma'am could not withstand her appealing face, encircled by its flapping cap-ruffle; and with an apparent delight she graciously accepted the pudding, murmuring her most correct "Thank you."

In another moment the delight had ceased to be apparent and had become real. One mouthful of the

"tasty" dessert proved that this was something quite out of the common, and the pretty plate was not returned to Granny till it was empty.

"O Mrs. Briggs! That was so kind of you. Your dainty has carried me back to the time when I went visiting my own grandmother in your New England, and her big kitchen with all its good things. I have enjoyed it more than anything I have eaten for a long, long time."

This was a trivial matter in itself; but it was not trivial in its results. Thereafter Miss Montaigne threw all her influence to bear in giving Jessica more frequent chances to meet her "humble friends," as Madame called them; and now and then to let her meet them as Ephraim had desired, under his escort to and fro.

One thing delighted his soul. Late in the year Madame added a riding academy to her school; or engaged one for certain afternoons of each week. Here the sharp-shooter knew his darling would shine, and she did.

Yet her success seemed for a time but to increase the unfriendliness of the "Con" side of the school. The riding classes had been added by the solicitation of Helen Rhineland, already a fine horsewoman, who, during her summer vacations had sometimes "ridden to hounds" with some fashionable house-party. She loved riding beyond all other exercise, and had been early taught. She looked for no rival in the matter; but the very first day, when Jessica had been admitted to the lesson, she saw that she might be equalled, or even eclipsed.

"That girl rides as if she were part of her horse. The master gave her that fractious brute of his own, as soon as she begged for it, thinking that the easiest way to

take down her self-conceit; and meaning, of course, to keep close beside her in case of a fall. Fall? The animal couldn't shake her off. He tried, forward and backward, sidewise and every other wise, but she stuck like a burr. The master was amazed. Soon he let go the bridle and only watched—to be ready for accident. After that he watched from sheer delight; and as soon as she had made the circuit of the ring a few times and had brought her mount down to a quiet pacing, he said: 'Miss Trent, I must congratulate you. I have nothing to teach you.'

"Then Jessica was afraid he wouldn't let her stay in the class, and asked him; and, of course, he said he was only too proud of the honor. Then he questioned her and found out that she had been put on a horse's back before she was out of baby-clothes and had to be held there, while the horse was led around; and afterward—'Well, afterward, I don't remember much except a horse, or sometimes a burro. One has to ride in California, it's so big, and wide, and places are so far apart; and, oh! yes! I forgot! I can ride an ostrich, too. King Zulu was the first one in America who was ever mounted, so the 'boys' claim. He is more fun even than the swiftest horse; he's faster, you know.'

"Fancy, Madame Mearsom, that girl talking away like that to our reserved master! But he liked it. He liked it so well, he even said: 'I thought I had a magnificent horsewoman in Miss Rhineland, but Miss Trent, I fear she will have to yield the palm to you.'"

"O Rosalie! I'm sorry he said that," answered Madame, to whom Miss Thorne had given the above

description. "I've heard about this division in the school—our rival favorites; and though I have seemed to ignore it, it has grieved me deeply. Helen is charming, but for some unknown reason she appears to have taken a dislike to Jessica. I am very, very sorry. There should be no rivalry or jealousy between those two. They are not of the same age, they differ in all respects—I mean are so unlike one another—they ought to be the best of friends. Do what you can, dear Rosalie, to bridge this difference. I wish something would happen to settle the matter!"

Something *was* to happen; but the anxious schoolmistress could not foresee that it would be in the nature of a tragedy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SOMETHING WHICH HAPPENED.

To solace her daughter for her chagrin in being out-classed by Jessica, Mrs. Rhinelanders gave her a new horse; as handsome a creature as could be found and "warranted kind and true."

All the other girls envied Helen her "Beauty," except the "Little Captain," now rapidly developing into an excellent scholar, and with her love of learning increasing all the time. She was ambitious to be that "star"—at the top not bottom of the school—and all the energy of her ardent nature was put into this work. The result of this was that, despite all prescribed rules for exercise and recreation, Jessica grew thin and somewhat careworn.

Ephraim was swift to observe this and to devise some plan for remedying it. He could think of nothing better than to send home to the "boys" for the "finest four-footed creatur' in all Paraiso d'Oro." So he wrote, as follows:—"The head girl to our 'Lady's' school has been give as purty a brute as ever I laid eyes on, and 'Little Captain's' has got to beat it. Now, Samson and John Benton, you put your heads together and finish up the job and express the creatur' 'long, double quick. Our girl isn't going to be down-sot, in the matter of horse-

flesh, by any trumpery New Yorker, and you see to it. There's horses here, course, and good ones; but no beast that hasn't breathed the superfine air of Californy is fit for our 'Lady.' Mum's the word till I get your telegraphed that 'Sobrante' has arrived, and then I'll put in my full share of the bill. I'm getting a new 'livery' made, same as Madam Dalrymple had me wear and 't made me feel such a fool, first time. But if I'm to be 'groom' to anybody, at my time of life, and it'll make things a mite nicer for my girl, I'll wear it, smiling.

"I've hung around that riding-school where they're tryin' to teach Jessie what she's known always, and I've made friends with the work folks. More'n that, 'Little Lady' has pointed me out to the master as her teacher at Sobrante, and he spoke to me as slick as molasses. Said I'd a pupil to be proud of and I 'lowed I had. Then, 'cause she was so pleased to have me 'round, he up and asked me to ride with his classes in the Park, whenever I had a mind. And don't you doubt but that 'll be every time they go out, soon's I learn what days it will be. And I cast an observin' eye on the outfit of his 'assistants' and I'm getting my own to match. I cal'late the next thing he'll be doing will be to ask me to help 'assist,' and that'll be something worth while. 'Twon't be on account of wages, neither, but just for the honor of Californy, to show him how an eighty-year-old can sit a horse, rheumatiz or nothing.

"So, don't let no grass grow under that horse's hoofs till he's shipped direct; and take it to your hearts that you'll be doing the square thing by the girl we all love

if you 'tend to this here business with neatness and despatch.

“Yours, till death and his exile ends,

“EPHRAIM MARSH.”

It was but a little more than two weeks later that, on a certain Thursday, “between four and six,” Jessica had a visitor.

The liveried colored man who admitted the stranger had doubts as to whether he should have done so, since the caller also wore a livery, though one not adorned by brass buttons.

However, Ephraim marched boldly in and selecting a chair which commanded the entrance sat down to wait with what patience he could till Miss Trent should appear. Other visitors were there, in the great room, and other pupils; all casting rather amused glances toward “Forty-niner” and wondering how such a social blunder had been permitted as his admission into those exclusive precincts. Possibly, the old man might have been abashed, had he observed these glances, but he did not. He saw nothing, heard nothing, till a beloved footstep sounded swiftly through the hall, and at a pace less decorous than Madame liked, Jessica came bounding into the room.

“O, you darling Ephraim! you did come at last, didn’t you! How dear of you! And you see it isn’t bad. Now you’ll come every Thursday won’t you? But—but, Ephy! How funny you look! Why have you got such a queer, brown suit? Riding boots, leggings,—you’re exactly like one of the grooms at the academy.

What notion possessed you? But never mind. I'm so glad, so glad to have you; and I would be even in your old overalls from the gardening last summer."

Jessica sat down close to her faithful friend but she couldn't repress her amusement, the frontiersman was so uncomfortable in his new attire, yet so full of suppressed excitement. With another smile she demanded:

"Do explain, Ephy. If you wanted new clothes why didn't you get Mr. Hale, or somebody who knows what's correct, to advise you? Even I——"

"Hold on, 'Captain.' Come over to that window, yonder!"

With his hat in his hand, he led the way across the room and pointing outward, demanded:

"Do you see that there bay horse, that boy is leading up and down? 'All saddled and bridled and fit for a Prince'?"

"Of course I see him. What a perfectly beautiful animal! See him, now! What knee action! What a neck! What shapely legs! Whoever owns that creature knows the 'points' of a fine horse. Is it somebody's you know?"

"I 'low it is. I 'low she does—know points. She'd ought to, being as she was raised on 'em, so to speak; and if you hadn't recognized them I'd have been plumb disappointed. For the creatur's *yours*! Arrived last night, overland, straight from the 'boys' at Sobrante, named 'Sobrante' himself, and waiting this minute for his new owner and mistress to try his paces with me as 'attendant.' That's why this pesky livery. That's why I've come. That's why you go ask your Madame, to

once, if you can't go for a canter in the Park if I'll wager my own neck I'll fetch you home safe, any time she names!"

Jessica's cry of delight was almost a scream. So "unladylike," in fact, that a caller near by elevated her eyebrows and remarked:

"What astonishing things! That groom, that ill-bred girl, I am surprised at Madame."

"Oh! that's nothing. She's our wild westerner, you know. One may expect any sort of behavior from her," replied the young lady addressed, a "Con" of the most decided sort, and an admiring follower of the handsome Helen.

However, Jessica had become inured to this kind of remark, which she happened to overhear, and though it didn't add to her pleasure it did not greatly detract from it. Indeed, her heart was beating so high at thought of her dear "boys'" remembrance of her that she could scarcely keep her feet from dancing; but she tried to remember Madame Mearsom's expressed desires, and with a low: "Come this way!" to Ephraim, she led him out of the reception room to a smaller one at the end of the hall, where tradesmen sometimes waited an interview with the mistress of the house.

"This is quieter, Ephy, and we're quite by ourselves. Wait just a minute. Madame is going out this afternoon but I'll run and ask that permission. If she'll only give it! How happy, how happy we will be!"

Already there was a glow upon the cheeks that had been paler than of old and "Forty-niner" felt he had acted wisely and well. Also, because of Jessica's good

record in her work and the eagerness in her face, Madame was graciously pleased to give the coveted permission and to add her congratulations on the fine gift.

"Two hours, only, from the time of leaving till you are back at the door, remember, my dear. And I hope, I certainly hope, you will have a most delightful ride."

From the windows of the reception room some watched the "Westerner" ride away and wondered at the ease with which she mounted and assumed control of an untried mount, one that was as restless and inexperienced in city surroundings as this beautiful creature from the plains.

"O Ephy! I feel almost, almost as if we were at home again, starting for a long, long ride—to Dr. Kimball's, or some other far-away neighbors. If I didn't have to wear this tight skirt I'd feel exactly like. Oh! how well he suits me! His back is perfect. They couldn't have chosen better—You dear Sobrante! I'd like to hug you, and I will!"

Suiting the action to the word Jessica leaned forward and clasped the horse's beautiful, arched neck, sending a thrill of pleasure through his equine heart. But another sort of thrill instantly followed. An automobile whizzed honking by and Sobrante promptly stood upon his hind feet.

Spectators along the avenue halted in fear. The girlish rider would certainly be thrown! Only she nor Ephraim showed no alarm. He merely checked the hired animal he bestrode and which he had taken care should be the best in its owner's stable, and watched. He was

ready to clasp Sobrante's bridle, should that be necessary, and to use his man's strength to bring the animal to subjection. However, this was not required.

Jessica's own fearlessness inspired her sensitive mount with confidence. Her whispered soothing words penetrated his consciousness and his affectionate nature responded to her love.

"Nothing but an 'auty,' Sobrante dear! Foolish things, they are not to be compared with such as you, my beauty; but plenty as can be. You'll get used to them, directly. They can't hurt you. Nothing shall hurt you, precious! Just hold your head high and proud, and disdain to look at them, you splendid fellow. Once we are in the Park, we'll get to the quietest place and—Go! That is, we'll pretend to go—but it won't be as we could at home. Steady, there, pet. Here comes another 'goose' on four wheels!"

Sobrante curveted and pranced, bowed his beautiful head, tossed it up and down, showed every symptom of that "disdain" she requested but—did *not* rise upon his hind legs. After that, with each succeeding moment, nearly, one of the offending, snorting monsters passed them by or met them face to face; and by the time they had entered the Park gates he had become familiar with at least one phase of the city streets.

Both Ephraim and Jessica were delighted with him.

"He's just as intelligent—as he looks! Some horses aren't, you know. And as handsome as he is wise. Oh! He's just perfect. He's far and away finer than that new 'Beauty' of Helen Rhinelanders. 'Beauty' is true to his name, course, but I don't like his eye. He shows the

white of it too much; and though he pretends he doesn't mind autos, isn't a bit afraid of them, he is. Down in his heart he is. I've watched him while we were out here in the Park. I think the master doesn't wholly trust that horse, either; else he wouldn't ride so close to Helen and leave one of his assistants to attend the beginners who need most care.

"Just to think, Ephy dear! I shan't have to ride a hired horse again! And I can hardly wait for to-morrow and our regular lesson. All the 'Pros' will be delighted with Sobrante; and I'd be glad to share him with them, if I were allowed."

"Don't do that, 'Captain,' not yet. You've got to let him learn you, first, so he would mind your voice even with somebody else in his saddle. And I'll be on hand. My shucks! But it will seem like old times for us to be riding together just as we used! Get up there, you slow poke! I've a mind to send home again for a creatur' of my own! Then I'd be fixed!"

Jessica said nothing to this; but all at once she appeared anxious for their return. So they wheeled about and arrived at the 'Adelphi' in such good time that Madame was greatly pleased and promised another outing for these two alone.

But Jessica's haste was not so much due to her obedience as to a notion that had entered her head when Ephraim spoke. If one horse could be shipped safely from Sobrante, why not two? So she spent the remainder of that recreation afternoon in writing to her mother and asking for "Forty-niner" a similar gift to her own. Also, in due time the letter was answered by the arrival

of another steed. Not quite so fine as Sobrante but far finer than any the sharpshooter could hire at the ordinary livery-stable; and when received his own delight was as great as Jessica's had been. He had been sorely perplexed between his longing for the animal and his sense of right. He hated debt, as had all his old employer's household. He must save to pay expenses during his life in New York, while his little lady was achieving that education she desired, and for his trip home again when that education was accomplished. He would not receive a gift of money from Mrs. Trent, and Jessica's "allowance" was most modest—also, generally used up to the last cent from quarter to quarter. But a gift of a horse—that was quite another matter; and it added to the old man's health as well as his pleasure.

But long before that letter was far on its way the hour had arrived for the riding class to take their trip to the Park. It was the custom on such occasions for the horses to be brought to the Adelphi and the young ladies to start from there, with the attendant master and his assistant teachers. This time when they assembled, Helen Rhineland first saw Sobrante, and Ephraim was gratified by the envious look she cast on the animal and on its graceful rider.

Reining her own "Beauty" up to Jessica's side, she inquired:

"Is that your own horse, Miss Trent?"

"Yes, indeed! Isn't he a dear? The 'boys' sent him," returned Sobrante's mistress, pleased to be noticed even thus much by the haughty senior.

"Hmm. He is—quite handsome. But, if he's been

reared in the—the wilds, you'll have trouble with him. You should be careful."

"Yes, of course. But there'll be no trouble. I've had him out once already and though he didn't like the automobiles, at first, he got so he despised them after a little while. He thinks elevated trains are dreadful but—he's as obedient as a horse can be. He knows me already."

"How absurd! That would be according him human intelligence, which no four-footed beast possesses. Don't be too confident."

Now there was nothing that would sooner arouse Jessica's quick temper than disparagement of horses; and she flashed back:

"Indeed, some horses do possess it—or its equivalent. Why, I could tell you things about Sobrante animals that would amaze you, if you didn't know they were true."

"And because you told them I suppose I *should* know that!" retorted Helen sarcastically. "I've often heard of 'California stories' and I'm not anxious for them. Only, take care. I've ridden for several years and I know horses are not to be trusted till after you've used them a long time. Even Beauty, here, is restless and I have to watch him all the time. He is intelligent, if you please, extraordinarily so, but he hasn't yet learned to 'despise' an auto, after all these weeks."

"Yes, he is intelligent—to a degree. Not like Sobrante, though; and if you've ridden for years I've ridden all my life. It is you who need warning. That Beauty is in a vicious mood, to-day. There is evil in his eye. Yes, I am ready!"

With this response to the master's question: "Ready,

young ladies?" Jessica fell into line, Ephraim beside her, the proudest man in the whole cavalcade, even though mounted on a beast the "boys" would have laughed at. But, as he had once ridden "Stiffleg" from love of that beast he now bestrode this hired hack from affection for his "Little Captain," who was growing so fast she was outstripping that adjective "Little."

The master himself took his place beside Helen Rhineland, and to that young horsewoman this was both pleasing and displeasing. It was flattering to be singled out as the only one of the class worthy such attention; yet, on the other hand, it suggested to onlookers that it was a case of precaution.

Beauty was certainly in an ugly mood. He fretted at the touch of her hand on the bridle, he acted as if he would like to take the bit in his teeth, and bolt; and to three of the party, at least, the arrival at the quieter Park was vast relief. These three were the master, the sharpshooter, and Jessica Trent. To these three a fine horse meant something higher than a servant or a beast of burden; he was a creature of keen perceptions and strong emotions.

That morning, Beauty had been roughly groomed. This was unusual and painfully trying to his sensitive skin and temper. Then his saddle had been found defective in some slight way and another which did not fit had been substituted. Other stable happenings had been unfortunate, and Beauty took the road far from fit to be trusted with so valuable a burden as Helen Rhineland.

However, for a time, after entering the Park, he seemed to forget his worries, as his young mistress pres-

ently forgot hers. To those who love it, there is nothing more exhilarating than a swift canter on a fresh spring morning, such as this; and the spirits of the whole party rose to the highest.

Suddenly from a side road, at a wild rate of speed, rushed a runaway automobile, tenantless, chauffeurless, tearing its own unguided way into the very midst of the horseback cavalcade.

"Ware! Ware!" warned the master, shrieked the grooms; while Ephraim would have planted himself directly in the path of the oncoming monster had not Jessica reached forward, seized his horse's bridle and jerked him aside.

"Ephy! you can't stop it! Look out, look out! O Helen!"

Beauty, like Ephraim, had planted himself in the way. For an instant he stood stock still, while the glaring red machine rushed toward his very front. The next he had reared and plunged and Helen was almost unseated.

What happened after that there were some who could not see, for they had closed their eyes against an inevitable tragedy.

But Jessica saw, comprehended, acted. With one toss of her own bridle into Ephraim's outstretched hand she was on the ground, had caught that of the frenzied Beauty and swerved him out of the road, Helen still clinging frightened but unharmed to her saddle. The next instant the automobile had dashed onward out of sight, but a girl in a blue habit lay huddled on the ground, a torn and bruised object from which they turned away their eyes, not daring to look upon her fair, brave face—so ghastly white and quiet now.

CHAPTER XVII.

RECONCILIATION AND REVELATION.

It was Ephraim who first recovered himself.

Leaping from his horse, he flung both bridles to any hand would catch them and with a strength and agility due eighteen rather than eighty years, he lifted his unconscious "Little Captain" in his arms and ordered:

"Ambulance! St. Luke's hospital!"

Then he tenderly laid Jessica's bleeding cheek against his shoulder, and with shaking hand did his utmost to stanch the flow of blood. For a moment he did not even weep, then the tears coursed down his bronzed face till they blinded him.

The whole party had gathered at a small distance, silent, stunned, unbelieving that such a dreadful thing could have happened, and to her the most unselfish, most innocent of them all.

"She gave her life to save the girl who hated her!" sobbed Rosalie Thorne, and again turned her eyes away.

"Look—look—at Helen! She seems—as if she were marble!" whispered another, feeling that even that subdued murmur were sacrilege.

The clang of an ambulance bell broke in on that silence and, as he had done once before, poor old Ephraim

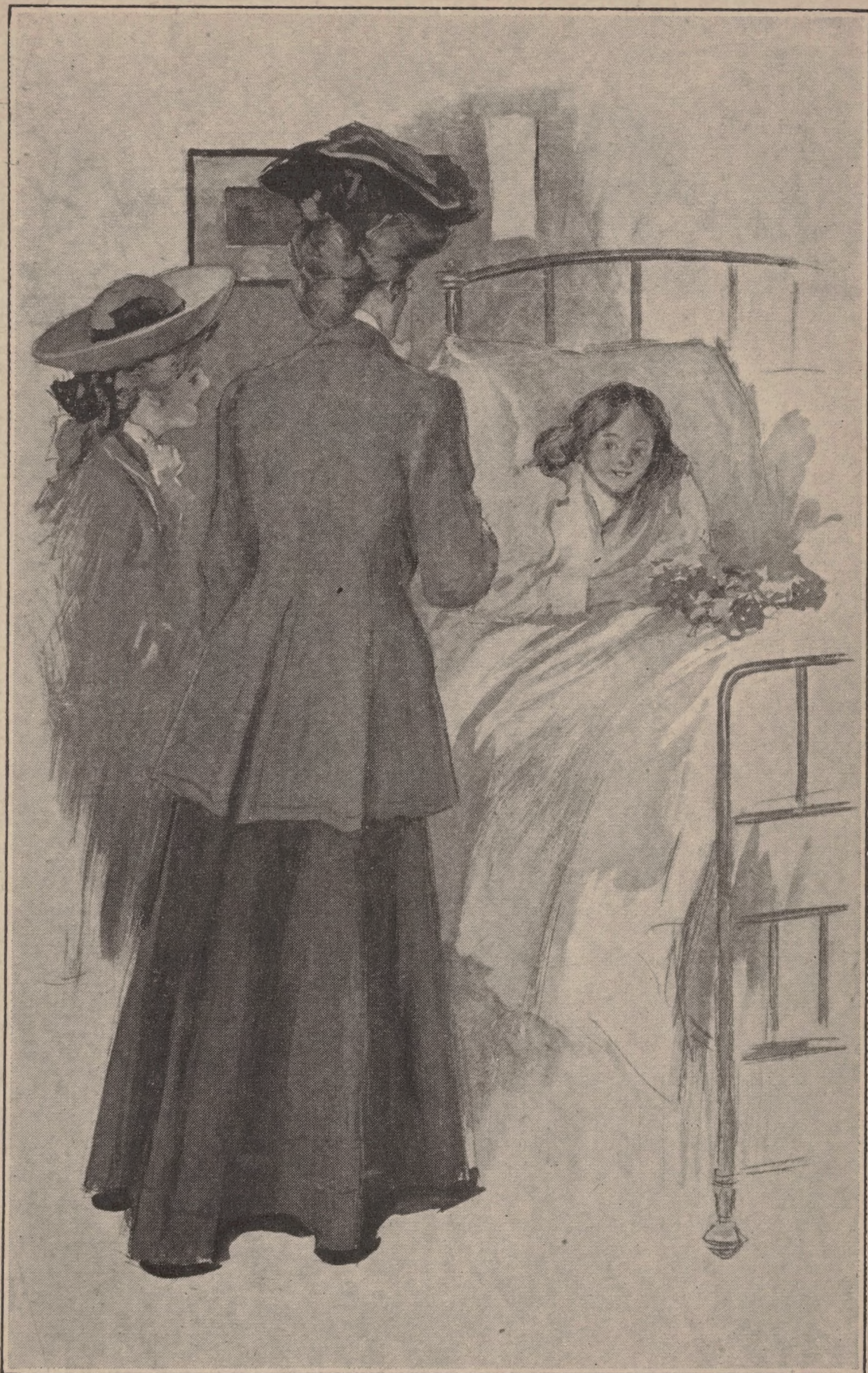
mounted the steps at its rear and followed his darling to her fate.

He had not heart for hope left in him. Girls could not twice escape such peril and live. His "Little Captain" was done for, she would see her beloved home no more; and again, as he had often felt, he realized that her coming east at all had been a grievous mistake. Then a strange feeling of exultation that he should be the only one of her "boys" who had followed her to the death rose within him and when he realized it, frightened him.

"It's as if I was glad—'t she's—she's—Hold on there, Ephraim Marsh! While there's life there's hope and if—if 'twas so—she'd—there wouldn't have been this on that!" he considered, holding before him the handkerchief he had pressed to Jessica's cheek, now so sadly stained with red.

Of course, Jessica was not dead. Had she been, this story would have ended then and there; but for a long time her young life swayed in the balance and the skill of the best was brought to her aid. Her mother was notified, for a time by hourly telegrams, then by daily ones, of her exact condition; and that she did not immediately hasten to her daughter's side was that she had herself suffered an accident of a broken limb and was helpless on her back.

Ned and Luis had disappeared up the canyon and as they had before—imperilled their lives in the mines—so now a presentiment of danger to them had sent her in pursuit. An unwary step, a loosened bit of rock, and her search was ended. She was carried home by the miners, two sadly repentant youngsters in her train, and for a



“It isn’t like a real hunchback, you know; only you were let fall when you were little and got twisted somehow.” (See page 112)

time so discreet was their behavior that the ranch mistress could scarcely regret her own mischance which had brought this improvement about.

Fortunately, Aunt Sally, aided by Cousin Margaret, was able to dispel much of the mother's anxiety; and when the news came that the girl was "out of danger" the former made a great feast and, preparing all the ranchmen by a preliminary dose of "medicine" for any possible ill results, celebrated the event in royal style.

Then she sat down and wrote a letter:

"MY DEAR LITTLE JESS:

"Your Ma has broke her leg, and a fine thing too. Nothin' short of broke bones would have set them two boys on the road to Good-ville. Sence then they've been next door to saints. Ain't hooked none of my pies nor browbeat Wun Lung. I made a supper for the 'boys' and all the rest the men-folks, and I tell you I made Wunny cook for all he was worth. I picry-ed 'em all 'round, first, so as to carry off any indigestion they might get, over-eating, and it done 'em good. Even though my son John did say 't he seen the most of 'em fling it on the ground, 'stead of into their stummicks.

"I'm glad you're to that hospital, where that Sophy girl is; and 'twon't do you a mite of harm to rest up a little from that studying. Too much book learning never did set well on a Trent's digesters and Ephraim Ma'sh, he wrote John that you'd been kind of peaked. So 'twon't hurt you. Tell them hospital folks that if they'd admire to have one my rising-sun or log-cabin quilts I'd admire just as much to send 'em. And I'll piece as many more

as they'll furnish the patches for. I spoke of that to Mis' Dalrymple and all she did was laugh in that slow, ladylike way of hern. She's real nice, Mis' Dalrymple is. Me and her has real good times a-comparin' notes about what used to be and isn't no more. I can see, easy as fiddlin', where 'tis your Ma gets her politeness. She was raised by Margaret Dalrymple; and you was raised by your Ma; and I do hope to goodness, Jessie Trent, that you'll try to do them credit. Neither don't you go flinging yourself against them *ortymobeels*, that fool folks have hatched out of their brains, these last years. I seen one. If you'll believe me, girly, one of 'em come whizzing onto this very ranch of Sobrante only last week that ever was. It was chock full of towerists and it scared the ranch horses into fits. But, worse and more of it. They fair set Ninian Sharp wild to own one hisself. He's makin' real good wages now, Ninian is, a-managin' the mines; and he seems to want every new-fangled thing a-going. Him with a world full of horses, and I thought he had more sense.

"Well, I'm sending you by express—John pays the cost—a box of home-made guava jelly, some fresh figs, some oranges, some—Well, I reckon a little of 'some' everything 't I could think of that would keep on so long a road. John, he says you could buy 'em all better and cheaper right there in that New York city than it'll cost to send this box. But I know better. Anyhow I know none bought there would begin to taste as nice to you as these right from Sobrante. You may be gettin' a terrible smart scholard, as Ephraim Ma'sh he wrote, but you'll never get to be anything except a girl that loves her

home and her folks better than anything else in the world. Bless you, my lamb! there ain't a night nor day that I don't go down on my old hunkies—I mean knees—and ask the Good Father to take special care of you, His fatherless child. There's many a heart aches for you, deary, and many an eye will shine—and cry, too—when that day comes that fetches you home. I've made up my mind to quit 'Boston,' to coax my silly, sick cousin to come out here and we'll build her a little bungalow to live in. 'Bungalow' is the new-fangled name they're getting here in Californy for just plain house, or cottage. The world thinks it's growin' powerful smart, don't it? There's doin's here, too, I tell you. We've got a regular village of houses for the miners, started already. You won't know Sobrante when you get back to it.

“Never mind. It won't be more'n three or four years, now, for you have been gone one already. Just think! A whole endurin' year, and you've been burned to death, and ortymobeeled to death, and got lost on the streets, and land knows what hasn't happened. But I'm thankful for the good word that come to-day; how you'll soon be back to that big school. Your Ma says that the teacher is going to take you and some the other scholars to camp out in the Airon docks this summer. I'm glad of it. I don't justly know what Airon docks, or Airydon docks, or whatever 'tis are. But I sort of sense that they're partly woods and partly water and partly mountings. Them three parts put together, and you sleeping right out doors in a tent—What do they do when it rains?—will make it seem most like Californy.

“Now no more till next time. I'd admire to put a

bottle or so of picry or somethin' in the box but John he won't hear to it. He says—No, I shan't repeat what he says. Not to a girl like you, 'cause it's so sort of onrespectful. I know you'll be glad to know I've got four more quilts ready pieced and fit to put on the quiltin'-frames. When them are done and I get two—three more done I'll nigh have reached my hundred limit, what I set for myself. John says what in—I mean he says what does anybody want of a hundred quilts, here in Californy with a summer climate all the year round. But John, he don't know everything, even if he thinks he does.

“It is ‘good-by’ for sure, this time. I’ve got to stop writin’ and talkin’ to you—as it seems like—’cause there’s some sort of goings-on out in Wunny’s kitchen. I cal’late them childern has been into some his messes and I can’t let Gabriell’ hear ’em, for it would make her fidget. Everybody sends love, and don’t forget to tell the hospital folks about the rising-sun and log-cabin.

“Your loving, foolish, hungry-for-you,

“AUNT SALLY.”

This letter was duly read by the nurse who had charge of Jessica to her convalescent, and as attentively listened to by Sophy, Ephraim, and even Granny Briggs, herself. It was visitors’ day and “Little Captain” was so far recovered that these now happy, cheerful callers could not harm her by the fatigue of conversation. The others laughed over it, enjoyed it, and even the sharpshooter somewhat ridiculed it.

Upon which, quoth “Sophia Badger, that was:”

“Now Ephraim Marsh, you ain’t half as smart as you

think. I take that letter for just what it's worth—right out of the heart of one the best women the Lord ever made. From all you've told me about her before, and what her own letter tells itself, I'd 'admire' myself to know her. She may be queer—so are you. I'm like the old Quaker who said: 'All the world's queer except thee and me, Hannah, and even thee's a little queer sometimes.' We can't see ourselves and our own queernesses. A good thing, too; but I wish there were a lot more 'Aunt Sallies' scattered around the world, brightening it and dosing it and keeping it wholesome. Think what a difference 'twould have made to Sophy and me if there'd been an 'Aunt Sally' living in Avenue A when we were starving there. No, Ephraim Marsh, you always were a light-headed kind of boy and you never have grown up. So, don't let me hear no more fun-making of that good woman in Californy, that I'd admire to know."

Thus strictly corrected the dame, who had fully assumed charge of her old playmate's mind and morals.

To divert attention from her beloved sharpshooter, Jessica cried:

"So you *shall* know Aunt Sally, Mrs. Briggs! And you are right; she *is* one of the best women in the world. I don't know what my dear mother would ever have done without her. In all her troubles and worries, mother has turned to Aunt Sally, and has always found help. So, when we go home; when Sophy, too, has finished her nurse's training and got her diploma; we'll *all* go home together. Sophy is to be superintendent of the hospital mother is to have built and we'll none of us who love each other be separated again, never again.

“ Oh ! the dreams I’ve had, the plans I’ve formed, lying here just getting well. Seems if my whole life long and every dollar that comes into my hands must go to make somebody happy. Somebody—no matter who—just the somebody that comes nearest and the happiness can reach the first. Life—it makes a girl think pretty seriously when she knows that just the tiniest bit more of a bruise or a cut would have ended that life. It seems as if I must hurry, hurry, to make up to somebody for any mischance has come to them. I——Beg pardon, nurse, what did you say ? ”

“ That these visitors have stayed their full time ; that Sophy must be taken back to her own place ; and that there is one more visitor wishing to see you. I think you have had enough callers as it is, but this one has been here nearly every day, inquiring, though not before asking permission to come up to your room. I think she is one of your schoolmates, and you must not expect to keep her long. Nor do you talk much. Let her talk and you just listen and she must not stay long.”

The others made their prompt adieus and departed ; Jessica remarking : “ I think it must be Rosalie Thorne. She’s been so kind and sympathetic. I don’t see how she has given so much time to calling, when she’s working so hard for her last examination. Only another week and then Commencement. Oh ! I hope I may be ‘ discharged ’ by that time, so I can see the girls in their pretty frocks and their flowers and their pride. Helen and Rosalie are honor girls, I know. Poor Helen. I wish she would learn to like me just a little bit before she goes away forever. She’s to live in Europe, Madame said, and perfect

herself in music. At least, to go on with it, though nobody can ever 'perfect' himself I suppose. Poor Helen! How near, how near she came to losing her own life that day! I remember I warned her about that Beauty. He——"

"There, my little patient. That's quite enough 'remembering' for now. What I want you to do is some forgetting, if you please, of all that is past and gone. Think! in another week you will be back at school, well and happy once more. Ah! here comes a maid with the young lady."

Jessica was sitting in her pretty chair, but rose as the caller entered; then promptly settled back again, while her outstretched arm sank slowly to her side. She was still weak enough to be unnerved by the sight of Helen Rhinelander whom her visitor proved to be and whom she had not seen since they two faced death together. Nor was she at all prepared for the strange behavior of the haughty senior, who hesitated on the threshold of the room, cast one glance toward the nurse—as if wishing that person elsewhere—then hurriedly crossed to Jessica's chair and sank on her knees beside it.

Helen's face was streaming with repentant tears and her voice tremulous with profound emotion as she caught up Jessica's still-bandaged hand and kissed it humbly.

"O Jessica, you savior of my life! Will you forgive me? Can you ever, ever learn to do it?"

"The—savior—Helen—Why, what can you mean? Why do you kneel? Why are you crying? Oh! don't please. Please, please, don't! It seems so queer—as if things were all coming to an end to have you kneel there

and ask me—*me*—to ‘forgive you.’ What in the world have I to forgive? It’s I should be forgiven, for I was angry. I was fearful angry that day, because you slighted Sobrante and praised Beauty. I—Yes, nurse. I know. I won’t talk about it, only long enough to make dear Helen understand.”

It was plain enough then that Jessica either did not know how brave her own action had been nor that all her recent suffering had been the price of saving her enemy’s life. Understanding this, the nurse delicately slipped away, leaving those two young souls to find out the truth from one another and to make that peace which their words signified had not existed between them.

“Jessica, don’t you know? Is it possible that nobody has told you how your flinging yourself upon that vicious Beauty prevented his trampling me under his feet and surely saved my life? He trampled you instead and I feel—I feel—O Jessica! I have been so mean, so little, so dastardly and hateful all along from the beginning. I can’t tell you how mean I feel. Can you forgive me? *Can you——*”

“Helen, Helen! Let’s change the question. Can you love me a little, tiny bit? That’s all I want in this world to be loved; or what’s better, be let to love other people just as much as I wish. You are so beautiful, so clever, I’ve just longed to love you, only—only—Say, Helen, that you can and will now.”

The senior’s answer was to clasp the convalescent in such a close embrace as satisfied forever Jessica’s longing in that question.

“Love you, ‘Little Captain’? Oh! with all my heart

and soul; and to try to be somewhat like you is now my dearest ambition. Kiss me, Jessie, kiss me once."

Not only kisses but tears commingled, to that extent the watchful nurse from the room beyond came back to her post and cut the interview short. But it was a very different, most radiant Helen who left that hospital room and repaired with her story and her good news to the motherly presence of Madame Mearsom.

When she had finished that narration, she added:

"And now, Madame, I want you to help me find a way to, at least, partially repay Jessica for her suffering. I know about hospitals. That it is very expensive to have a private room and one 'special' nurse, even one; yet Jessica has had two, and sometimes three. That means, I suppose, that she has been in extremest danger. I want to help her. Will you find out for me, and arrange it as only your tact can, so that her pride won't be hurt? The whole bill, surgeons, nurses, room, every possible expense; my mother and I wish to pay it and as soon as we can learn how much it is. Of the larger debt—that I owe her my very life—I can't speak yet. Time will show me some way, I hope, to prove I'm grateful for all that.

"Why, Madame! You are smiling! What can I have said? Haven't I offered it right? I'm glad, we're glad, to do much more if you will tell us what."

"Helen, what has put it into your head that Jessica Trent needs any financial 'help'?"

"I—I really do not know. Except that all of the girls think, or have been told, that she is one of your charity pupils."

Then, indeed, did Madame Mearsom laugh and heartily :

“ My dear, that is the most absurd blunder your young heads ever made. Jessica Trent is what is called ‘ A Copper Princess.’ She is the richest pupil I have ever had.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TELLING VALEDICTORY.

THE Adelphi was transformed

Upholsterers, florists, caterers had been so busy in all the main rooms that when Jessica stepped into them, on her return from hospital, she scarcely believed she had come to the right place.

Yet she could not be mistaken, for a bevy of happy girls, headed by Helen Rhinelanders herself, had been watching from the upper windows for the arrival of the carriage that brought her; and these now swooped down upon her with all the extravagance of greeting natural to warm-hearted maidens.

"Jessie, you darling! So they did let you come in time for Commencement, after all! Only last night Madame bade us be prepared for disappointment, for one of the hospital surgeons said he feared the effect upon you of so much excitement. So you mustn't get excited. Not the least bit in the world!" And as a soothing measure, Aubrey Huntington caught her recovered friend around the waist and gave her a wild whirl.

Jessica laughed, caught her breath, began to declare that she wasn't—she wouldn't be "excited," and had her sentence finished, or smothered, by a frantic hug from somebody else.

Then came Natalie with the message that:

“Madame wants Jessica in her own private room at once. She’s afraid to trust her with us, I suppose, and I think it’s real mean to snatch her away the very minute she gets home.”

“Ah; it does seem like home, really, to be among you all again. Only what’s been done to the rooms? They are so beautiful, and what a lovely, lovely world it is, to-day! Seems if there were so many places to be happy in, so many one can call a sort of home—This, the hospital, Ephy’s flat, and precious Sobrante. I wish—Oh! how I wish every girl in all the world could be as happy as I am this minute! Yes, Natalie, I’m going to Madame right away. But I must say I wish I’d thought to ask her to have a thin white dress made for me, too. You all look so sweet and dainty.”

They escorted her to the schoolmistress, Helen herself slipping her strong arm about the other’s waist, and clasping Jessica’s hand, that had been so brown and was now so thin and white, with a fervor which told how deep her own emotion.

Then Madame Mearsom took her from them with a motherly kiss and the remark:

“Exercises do not begin until ten o’clock. For the time between, Jessie must rest quietly right here with me. Ah! how well you all look. I am certainly proud of my girls, to-day.”

Yet there was a ring of sadness in the teacher’s voice. Some of these would leave her soon, to return no more. They had been with her for years. She had done, or tried to do, a mother’s part by them and she loved them. They

loved her, too, of that she was sure; but—the young go away and forget, the old remain and remember.

However, it was not this wise woman's way to cast any shadows over other people's sunshine; and it was now with a gay smile that she waved them all away and shut the door upon herself and her restored pupil. Then she led Jessica directly to her own capacious lounge, made her lie down, covered her lightly with a silken spread, and bade her go to sleep.

"Sleep, dear Madame? When it's only morning and I've just come home? Why, I can't!"

"Yes, you can. I command it; but first drink this bit of bouillon that the maid has brought. Commencement day is always an exciting one, even for the perfectly well and strong. You are well, too, now, but not yet strong. After your nap you shall be dressed and go to join your mates. This is the first Commencement you have ever attended. You will find much to interest."

Jessica sat up and sipped the bouillon: then lay down and at a fresh command obediently turned her face to the wall. Within five minutes she was asleep; and the next she knew, Madame was saying:

"It is almost ten o'clock. I must leave you. Maid Maria will help you in your toilet. All your things are ready in my room."

Jessica rose and entered the bedroom, where so few of the Adelpheans were ever admitted, and stared in astonishment at Maria, holding up an exquisite frock of sheerest white, lace-trimmed and blue-ribboned in a bewildering fashion that showed the touch of some master modiste.

"Oh! how pretty? Which of the girls' is that? And what am I to wear? My white muslin, with the two tucks—Oh! dear! I forgot. That was left mussed last time I wore it, at a rehearsal. But——"

"This is your own, Miss Trent. Madame said I was to dress you in it. It was made from the measure of your old frock and looks as if it would just fit. Now, if you please. It's getting on to time."

This seemed too good to be true. All her schoolmates had appeared before her, garbed in white, with the colored ribbons of each class adorning them. These blue ones meant that she had been promoted and must be—

"Why, Maria, if I'm to wear this pale blue that must mean I'm now a third-former! Oh, oh, oh!"

"I reckon 'tis, Miss Trent. Promotions always are at the end of the year, which seems funny to be called Commencement when 'tis just the other way. Ah! such soft pretty hair you have. A pity they had to cut it short, at that there hospital!"

"I don't think it a pity. Hair will grow and it's lots easier brushed when short. Ah! it does fit, doesn't it? What a dear, dear Madame! How sweet and thoughtful of her to have it all ready without my having to ask or wait. It is pretty, Maria! I do look nice in it, don't I? I mean—I'm not vain about it, but I'm so glad to look like the rest."

"Sure; and Madame Mearsom's not the one to let anybody look different from their mates. Not she. Even the charity scholars have new things——"

"Charity scholars, Maria? Are there such in this rich school?"

"Course. Several, or some. I don't know how many. I only know there are, account of paying bills for Madame, times."

"Which are they?"

"Ah! there, Miss Trent! *I* don't know, nor nobody, not even the charity ones themselves. Nobody knows except Madame and the folks they belong to. Madame says to have them and to teach them is her great privilege. She's found the world a place of kindness and she's been successful; so she just sort of passes it on. A good woman is Madame; and now you're ready, and here come a lot of the girls to take you with them. Be careful, Miss Trent. Remember you're but just getting well."

What a day that followed!

In the big hall, or largest class-room, a temporary platform had been erected and banked with the roses of that sunny June. Behind the roses sat the Faculty. Jessica had not known how large this was nor of how notable presence till she saw this body of gentlemen arrayed in a group before her. In the very place of honor sat Madame, herself richly gowned, and far more imposing in appearance than she had seemed in her ordinary attire.

All her assistants were near her, Miss Montaigne with the rest, smiling a tender welcome to her "special." There, too, a little apart from the rest, where the roses were heaped highest, their own arms filled with flowers, sat the seniors, the first form girls, who were to be graduated from this school of text-books, this day, and enter upon the larger school of life.

There was music, there was prayer, there was a brief address. But the latter was delivered in the perfunctory way common to such occasions and listened to with an attention equally perfunctory.

It was the row of "sweet girl graduates" themselves that alone claimed and retained the interest of everybody in that crowding audience. Rosalie Thorne was salutatorian, and Helen, valedictorian.

Rosalie acquitted herself well, with her own native modesty and sympathetic manner, and to her, at least, this leave taking of her old associates was a trying ordeal.

It was not until the President of the Adelphi Association had presented the diplomas that Helen Rhinelandar arose to perform her part. In the traditional manner of valedictories, she went over many of the incidents of the last few years, during which her own residence at the Adelphi had continued, and brought her essay to a close by a few telling sentences.

"The Adelphi has always been known as a center of great social influence for good, but it has never before cherished in its midst a life-saver. Now it does. There has come to dwell among us a girl who did not hesitate for the fraction of a second to offer her own life to preserve that of another, that other not her friend."

Helen paused and looked over the sea of faces yet saw but one: the flushed, embarrassed, distressed face of Jessica Trent; who felt that if the speaker added another word to those which had gone before she would surely sink in mortification. Helen, who, had now professed to love her! Helen to do this horrid thing! To hold her

up to the gaze of all these strangers because she had done—Well, what anybody would have done, in the same moment and danger!

But she need not have feared. Helen was neither unkind nor indelicate, but she had a purpose in her speech and kept on her way to disclose it, without so much as once again glancing Jessica's way. Neither, to that young person's infinite relief, did anybody else. The orator's reference had been too impersonal, Jessica looked so exactly like all the other maidens in their fine attire, that nobody not in the secret suspected who was meant nor what was coming.

"When one has a heroine for a neighbor, one naturally looks up to that person and wishes to please her. Our life-saving, life-sacrificing heroine had often expressed a certain wish. We have all heard it, ignored it, or forgotten it, until her brave act reawakened a desire to gratify her.

"Once, it seems, she visited a certain poor quarter of this city where little children swarmed in the gutters and wretched mothers were forced by ill-paid toil to neglect these helpless little ones. They have been forgotten by the rest of us; their desperate poverty has mocked at our abundance; there has been none to give them a thought, except our young heroine whose repeated assertion has been: 'When I grow up, if I can in any way get the money, I will build homes for such poor babies. They shall have big airy rooms with kind nurses to attend them. They shall have plenty of toys, *plenty* of toys, plenty of everything to make them grow up good and not wicked. How can they help being wicked, living as they do?'

So she has often talked and we have listened, as to the dreams of a child, unknowing whereof she spoke.

"All that is changed. The girl who would lay down her life for another is not a dreamer, she is a practical Christian. And now I, whose life was that one saved, desire to gratify her wish, her dream, if you please, to make it happy reality. I will be one to start a home for those gutter babies, regretting only that I cannot accomplish the work without asking help from others, and I do it for love of this dear, dreaming heroine.

"To build a home and equip it for the children of Avenue A and its swarming tenements I now open a subscription list and head the same with five thousand dollars. Who comes next?"

Jessica was no longer abashed nor self-conscious. All her heart was in the scene that ensued, when Madame followed that eloquent appeal with her own subscription of five thousand. She was well known as a fairly rich woman and, in proportion to her means, for an extremely liberal one. Therefore, nobody except the "heroine" herself was greatly surprised by her action: but there were others in that rose-adorned hall who loved Madame and had been trained by her. Old pupils that were now, some of them, growing gray-headed women, but who still revered their old instructress and followed where she led.

"Two thousand," said one.

"Ten. Put me down for ten thousand, Miss Rhineland," another.

"Even one thousand will help. It takes a heap of money to build a substantial "home" in this city and I'd

like to make it more. But my subscription is, for the present, one thousand dollars. Have you my name correct, Miss Rhinelanders," cried still a third.

Experienced persons say that sympathy goes in waves. Many a big sum has been raised by the sympathetic wave set in motion just as this one has been; and, before the benediction was pronounced over that assembly, sufficient money had been guaranteed to make the dream of Jessica Trent a future reality.

As for that happy girl, she could not at all realize this fact, though her fancy had again returned to the pitiful small faces which she had never forgotten and always hoped to help. Not till Helen sought her and drew her into a quiet spot did she begin to understand.

"You see, Jessica dear, I thought, well I thought you were a 'charity' and I told Madame that I wanted to pay for all your stay in the hospital. Then she told me that you were, or would be, a great deal richer than any of us; and she suggested that if I wanted to please you I could best do it by furthering some of your 'dreams' about other people. Then I remembered hearing the girls talk of your being so touched by the Avenue A babies, and I hoped that since I couldn't do anything for you, personally, I might for them. That's all. My part is a thank-offering. I think all the rest is pure charity. Are you glad?"

"Glad, Helen? I'm so glad I can hardly breathe. And I can almost hear my mother saying: 'Just a link in life's chain, Jessica.' I, Buster I mean, ran away and I went to Avenue A. Just a little thing like that, yet out of it came—all this! Oh! isn't it grand? isn't it beautiful just

to be alive, helping in the 'chain,' seeing the happiness grow! Oh! I thank you, Helen, more than words can tell. And—and how soon do you think that home can be built? Do you suppose I'll see it done before I, too, graduate? I can hardly wait till I get a chance to write home to my mother and ask her to put her own name down on that list. She will, she'll help. O Helen! What a happy day this is!"

"Yes. But a sad one, too. Just as I begin to know you I must lose you. Even now, within this hour. My mother is waiting—Good-by, good-by!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DREAM AND THE REALITY.

THUS ended Jessica Trent's first year at school. It was the forerunner of others so like it that no record is needed. There were summer vacation trips in various directions, visits to the homes of schoolmates, and one year—the third of her absence from Sobrante—was spent in Europe.

The intimacy with Aubrey and Natalie begun on her entrance to the Adelphi, continued through all their mutual course and at last the time came when they, too, were to be graduated; strangely enough, Aubrey with first honors and our heroine with none. She wrote home:—

“DEAR MOTHER:

“You're going to be dreadfully disappointed in me, I know, and I wish, I wish I could make it otherwise. But I can't. I think all that feverish energy of the first year was but a 'spurt,' as rowers say. It came from shame. But as soon as I had picked up enough to keep even with the girls of my own age I couldn't tear ahead and climb any more of that 'bean stalk' dear Miss Montaigne

used to talk about. Poor thing! She feels a deal worse about my stupidity than I do. She thought she had found a genius to instruct when she first took hold of my brains, but she made a mistake.

"I can sing—a little. I can fiddle, or violin, enough to make it pleasant for the 'boys' when I get home. I can sew a seam and I've never forgotten Aunt Sally's parting injunction to 'keep my stockings mended.' I can set a table, I can entertain a guest, I've been through the cooking class and can do an omelet or a Welsh rarebit to a turn. I've studied banking and economy till I think, I hope, I can take care of a good deal of your business; or, at least, can see that nobody carries it on badly.

"I can trim a bonnet, I can make a gown, and I can wash fine laces. Aubrey says she doesn't see what Madame's pupils need of such 'accomplishments,' but Madame, who is wise, says one never can tell what one may or may not need to know. Anyway, it was her place to give us an all around education and she's done her best for us.

"I can speak French and German well enough to act as interpreter on our trip abroad, and I've hammered enough Latin into my head to understand Botany and a bit of mineralogy. But I don't yet see how long it would take Mr. A, working so many hours a day to be as smart as Mr. B, working some other time. Arithmetic isn't my strong point.

"In brief, dearest mother, you'll find your girl is just a plain, home-loving, people-loving, glad-to-be-alive-and-a-link-in-the-chain sort of creature; and thus forewarned you're not to be so greatly, greatly disappointed,

if you please. I'm not a 'star,' as you were; not even that bottom-of-the-class-one I sometimes aspired to be.

"Your room is all ready. You are to stay right here at the Adelphi while you are in town. Madame, my second mother, will hear of no other arrangement; and, dear, she has promised she will accept your invitation to go home with us to Sobrante and stay all summer.

"Last evening we went to a sort of farewell reception at the 'Adelphi Home for Children,' our blessed sanctuary for the little ones over on Avenue A. As I looked at that great building, with all its fine appointments, its comfort and its hosts of happy babies, I got—as I used to say when I was a baby myself—'all chokey up.' And I sighted backward along the 'chain' to that far-away afternoon when Buster laid its corner stone, so to speak. Knocking down one little maid from Avenue A was the real beginning of things.

"You'll be in time for Sophy's graduation, too. She is so strong and well now, and such an ideal nurse. They're going to miss her dreadfully at St. Luke's which has been her home so long. The Superintendent told me there was nobody who could manage a fractious patient with the skill and tenderness of our dear Sophy. She's the real honor girl of our family. It seems to me there isn't anything in the realm of nursing that she hasn't conquered. The head surgeon says she could even perform one of those fearful 'operations' if necessary, though I hope it never will be.

"You should see the darling's pride in her new, white linen uniforms. All her old blue gingham, 'probationer' ones she is leaving for any other girl who wants to be a

nurse and hasn't money for her clothes. You'd think it was bridal finery to see Sophy handle those garments: see her fondle the spotless aprons and dainty caps; and hear her murmur: 'At last, at last! I am authorized and free to do for others what has been done for me!' She looks so pretty, so earnest, so noble, that I'm sure some of our 'boys' will want to break a bone or two just to have her attend them.

"I've paid my last visit, too, to Granny Briggs in her apartment. She is as happy as Sophy and as proud, but far more weighed down with the cares of life. 'What will I do with this here painted plate, what Miss Montaigne first et Indian puddin' off?' 'Them granite pots 't Ephraim Marsh bought, and don't need scourin' all the time, I certain can't leave them behind to be thrown into a rubbish heap!' Ephraim sits and chuckles and says that he too, 'at last, is on the road to freedom. Sophia Badger that was has badgered the life out of him 'cause he's so forgetful and will eat stuff no man of his age ought to, though it's never hurt him a mite. Fire the whole mess of trash into the garbage box, Sophia, and let the poor ash-man get the benefit of 'em. We don't need no New York truck on our ranch, Sophia. We're going home to Sobrante.'

"The dear old fellow is as happy as a child; but, mother darling, there's a lump in my throat every time I hear him say that sweet word 'home.' He *is* going. He *must* hold out till he gets there and maybe, oh! maybe, the 'superfine air of Californy, where folks live to be a hundred and fifteen years old, some of 'em,' may put that new life into his veins that he anticipates. But there are

moments when my eyes fill looking on his blessed, honest, rugged face and I see how worn and thin it is. 'Sophia Badger' sees the change in him, as well. She has never said so and I would not ask her if she did. I couldn't bear to hear my own fear put into words. She merely cossets him and feeds him and scolds him more than ever; yet does it all with that maternal smile that makes my heart ache. The two poor, dear old creatures! Who still talk of their childhood 'scrapes' in 'Cawnco'd' as if it were but yesterday. Ephraim has sent up-river for Buster and that happy broncho is also ready for his homeward trip.

"Altogether, we shall be, *must* be a merry, merry party; and I can hardly realize that I have come to a time when I am writing my very last letter to you. Before another one could reach you we shall be together, face to face.

"Till then, and hoping you are duly prepared for the girl you haven't seen in five long years—just because you thought it wiser and better for me that I should mature outside the family garden—I bring this long one to a close.

"Your daughter,
"JESSICA."

Commencements are much alike. This one that witnessed Jessica Trent's graduation, might have been any other of her whole school course, so far as outward appearances went. There were the same artistic decorations, the same superabundance of flowers, the same well-spread tables. There was almost the same old

crowd of eager spectators so like were these to the gatherings gone before.

But there was always, as there always will be, a great difference to the maidens most concerned.

To Jessica's vast astonishment, she had been chosen valedictorian of her class; and with a fine ambition that here, at least, she might make her mother proud, she had worked night and day on her essay and had brought it to what even Madame pronounced a fine and graceful climax. Jessie had a gift of speech and she had a gift of pen; but— Let us not forecast!

Almost the same Faculty occupied the platform. Almost the same teachers sat beside the stately Madame; and almost the same group of white-clad maidens waited with fluttering hearts for their bit of sheepskin which the President would soon present them.

Mrs. Trent was there, grown scarcely old in these past years, because of the greater ease and luxury of her life. Madam Dalrymple, in shimmering silk and coiffure quite as bewildering as when her young "second cousin twice removed" had first beheld her. She had made the long trans-continental journey—"I left my rheumatism behind me in that dry air of California"—to witness a scene which would bring back that one when Gabriella, beloved of her heart, had also graduated. She even "Poohs!" at that mother's disappointment in that Jessica is not a world-famous scholar. "Why, what do you want, Gabriella? The child is a gentlewoman—one glance shows it—and the only 'career' to which she need aspire is to make our home a real home, back there at Sobrante." Leave the scholarship to Ned. That boy

has reached the necktie stage of his existence and begins to think about his hair and finger nails. He has brains enough, else he'd never have been so mischievous. Don't worry because Jessica isn't a mannish woman, but be content. For my part, I never saw a more beautiful, wholly satisfactory girl. You couldn't hold a candle to her even in your earliest youth; and now you see how good my judgment was. If I hadn't fairly nagged you into sending her to me you'd never have seen such a picture as that yon," finished the delighted dame, nodding her white pompadour stage-ward.

Ephraim was there, Mrs. Briggs and Sophy beside him; all in that same front row with Mrs. Dalrymple and Gabriella; also a young lad who is taking his first peep at life outside his home and whom the valedictorian can scarcely believe is the scampish little "tacker" she remembers, even Ned.

"Now, Jessie. Do us credit," whispers Miss Montaigne, as the fateful moment arrives and the girl steps forward to repeat the speech she has so carefully memorised. She is a "dream of beauty," as Madam Dalrymple has declared. Her movements are graceful and easy. She wears her exquisite graduation gown as unconsciously as if it were her ordinary school frock, and that Madame has, also, said is to be a mark of gentleness. "Such people are clothed—they never wear their clothes."

Jessica bows, very prettily, very low. She opens her lips and a word or two issues thence. Then, most unfortunately, she lifts her eyes toward a group of other

girls, with whom she has joyed and sorrowed during the close intimacy of these past years and—disaster!

Her eyes fill, her face flushes, pales, is covered by her slim white hands—and Jessica Trent has ignominiously broken down. A fierce sob escapes her—is taken up and echoed by one, a half-dozen, all of those white throats of her beloved mates, and they are all weeping in concert. Even some of the audience, moved by a profound sympathy, shed a few tears in concert; and—Commencement is over!

“Well, there generally is some unusual happening to mark the close of our year together, but we’ve never had just this sort of thing before; and it’s all because we never before graduated a girl whose whole nature was just *love!*” said poor Miss Montaigne, whose own heart was heavy at this parting.

Sobrante?

Yes, at last. The special or private car, also the “Sobrante,” is slowly approaching the terminal of the railway—the Sobrante mines. It is also an observation car and its open spaces are crowded with such eager people as never before journeyed over that route. Old faces, young faces, but never a sad nor lonely face among them; and happiest of all is Jessica Trent’s.

With trembling lips she questions Ninian Sharp as she has used to do in the days before she was a “young lady”; and he who has met her and all the returning party at Los Angeles answers as swiftly as she asks:

"What is that big stone building crowning the mesa, old Pedro's mesa?"

"Our new St. Luke's hospital; over which your friend Miss Sophy is to rule."

"That spire? Is that a *church*, right here at our own dear home?"

"Yes. The Church of the Good Shepherd—Who has cared for His unfortunates," replies the mine manager, lifting his hat.

"That long low building, in the valley, where the raisin-grapes used to grow?"

"Ah! you haven't forgotten localities, I see. That's our library, reading-room, bowling alley, amusement place in general."

"That other, of red brick with white trimmings?"

"Our school; one of the best equipped and officered in southern California."

"Those cottages? Such rows and rows of them, each with its bit of green about it—Who lives in them? Where have the people come from? you must have irrigated well and lavishly to make so much verdure here."

"The miners', carpenters', and farmers' homes. Yes, we've water now and to spare. We tapped it in the mountains, an ever-constant flow, and water you will remember, Miss Jessica, is a 'mine' in itself to California."

"Everywhere, everywhere, such changes and so fine! Yet it almost grieves me to come home and find it all so changed. But that is wrong. It is the dream of my dead father's life made blessed reality. So, I am glad after all, and I feel that from somewhere he is looking down

on me returning, bidding me take up and carry on the work he planned, that you have organized, and that old Pedro's gift made possible.

"Ah! here we are! And *this* is unchanged! This dear old 'house' is not one bit different from my memory of it! Home, home, at last?"

As she sprang from the car and sped across the little intervening space which yet remained, there issued from that cottage door a plump old lady, decorated everywhere with strips of flying patchwork, her glasses on top of her old gray head, and a bottle in her hand, which so shakes with delight that the vial falls to the ground and breaks.

"Why, Jess—All that good picry—Jessie, my love, my lamb! Luis! Wun Lung! John, Marty, Ephraim Ma'sh—man alive you needed that medicine, you needed it powerful, and it's wasted! Never mind, I've got more and after supper—Wun Lung, do you dast tell me you come out and left them 'sally luns' to scorch? Back into that kitchen and serve up that supper or I'll cut your pig-tail off!"

With this dire and oft-repeated threat the Chinaman disappeared, salaaming and katowing to the last, as he retreated backward and fixed his admiring gaze upon the girl he had known and always loved.

But why seek to describe that joyful homecoming? Those who have home-loving hearts may well imagine it for themselves; and those who have not would not be interested.

But never was there, could there be, a more grateful heart than Jessica Trent's, as she stood that night before her own old, open window and looked out over that vast

estate of which she was to be the chatelaine; while from her lips there rose the humble, happy cry:

“O Thou dear God Who givest all, make me to be worthy of my Inheritance!”

THE END.

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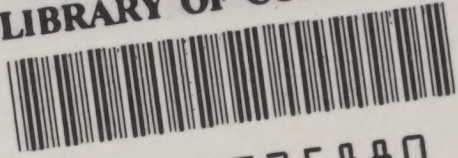
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